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THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN ENGLAND

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN ENGLAND

VOL. I

FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE ENGLISH REFORMATION TO THE DEATH OF QUEEN ELIZABETH

VOL. II

FROM THE ACCESSION OF JAMES I TO THE CONVENTION OF THE LONG PARLIAMENT

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THE DEVELOPMENT
OF
RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN ENGLAND

FROM THE CONVENTION OF THE LONG PARLIAMENT TO THE RESTORATION, 1640–1660

The Revolutionary Experiments and Dominant Religious Thought

by

W. K. JORDAN, Ph.D.

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TO

W. R. and S. B. R.

PREFACE

When the research for this series was begun a decade ago the principles of religious toleration and political liberalism were accepted as axiomatic in the Western European culture in which the writer had been nurtured. But more recently profoundly significant historical trends have become apparent which seem to threaten the very foundations of the liberal philosophy. Religious liberty in Western Europe has been less assailed by the new bigotries only because political loyalties and economic interests have so largely replaced the religious preoccupation. The contemporary totalitarian philosophy would appear quite as dangerous to moderation and liberalism as the religious exclusivism which preceded it. The historian betrays his art and his craft when he views the events of the past in the perspective of the dark and uncertain light of the present. The writer may perhaps be permitted to observe, however, that religious toleration and political liberalism were attained only after a long and heroic struggle and an awful propitiation of blood. History yields its blessings to mankind but slowly and painfully. Our generation would indeed be faithless if it delivered up its richest heritage on the altars of a new and brutal barbarism.

It was originally planned to complete the series with the third volume. The materials for the revolutionary period have proved so rich and voluminous, however, that it now appears desirable to conclude the work with a fourth volume which will examine the contributions of the laymen, the extremists, and the Anglicans to the development of religious toleration during the revolutionary era. An extended summary and general statement for the entire work will likewise be included in the final volume. Though the literature of the subject has been examined with some care to the Revolution of 1689, it has appeared eminently desirable to conclude the study with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. The theory of religious toleration had been fully elaborated by that date and, what is more important, the mass of responsible opinion seems by that time to have been convinced by the persuasion of reason and the logic of historical development of the necessity of religious toleration if not of its positive virtues. In the next generation the issue was transferred from the realm of theory to the arena of political discussion and, after the necessary accommodations had been made, limited legal toleration was incorporated into the fabric of the constitution.

Considerations of space make it seem inadvisable to include the bibliography with this volume. An effort has been made, however, to give a clear and reasonably full citation for every work mentioned. It is hoped that the complete bibliography for the whole study can be published concurrently with the appearance of the concluding volume.

The writer is under a great obligation to several scholars who have read portions of the manuscript and who have lent him invaluable assistance on points on which they are eminent authorities. The author likewise desires to express his great appreciation to many scholars who in their criticisms of the earlier volumes have corrected many of his errors and, it is hoped, have restrained his enthusiasms. The Harvard University Committee on Research in the Social Sciences has generously continued its grant for the completion of the entire series.

W. K. J.

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
August 1937

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION IN ENGLAND

I

THE PERIOD OF PURITAN (PRESBYTERIAN) DOMINANCE AND THE QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION, 1640–1648

A. THE ATTACK ON THE ANGLICAN ESTABLISHMENT AND THE CONSIDERATION OF THE PROBLEM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT, 1640–1643

1. EARLY DEBATES ON THE CATHOLICS, ARMINIANS, AND ECCLESIASTICAL CORRUPTIONS, NOVEMBER 1640–FEBRUARY 1641

The convention of the Long Parliament opened the floodgates of rebellion in politics and of anarchy in the spiritual life of England. A generation of incompetence in high places and the ill-advised repression of religious dissent and political protest had brought the nation to a new and confused era. The counsels of moderation, though hardly destroyed, were now wholly ignored, and England was left the prey of rival and rigidly intolerant orthodoxies.

Our concern during this revolutionary period will be confined to tracing the development of the religious forces which, once the weight of repression was removed, rose in a confused, contradictory, and fanatical medley to engage the attention of Englishmen. But religious and political grievances were in this period most intimately interwoven. The Civil War would hardly have occurred had it not been for the harsh intolerance of Laud and the amazing inability of the Stuarts to gauge the strength and meaning of religious forces which they had resolved to destroy. The system of enforced conformity which they had striven to rear, lacking the resiliency and the broad base of the Elizabethan ecclesiastical structure, was to collapse ignominiously with the first rude impact of rebellion. For more than a decade English public opinion had been restrained through censorship of the press and a rigid enforcement of the libel laws, and had been denied its traditional right of self-expression and criticism on the floor of Parliament. The Puritan majority in the opening sessions of the Long Parliament came quickly to realize that its great source of strength lay in the impotency and unpopularity of the Establishment as it had been defined and ordered by the Anglo-Catholic leadership of the Church. At the same time, Puritan members were to provoke a decade of bitter religious controversy and struggle by the assumption that the destruction of Anglo-Catholicism gave to their party a mandate for the establishment of still another inflexible religious order in England. England had learned the basic lessons of toleration in the harsh school of Charles and Laud, and Englishmen, drawn from numerous intellectual and religious camps, were to unite to destroy the no less intolerant threat of Presbyterian bigotry.

The Long Parliament passed almost immediately after its organization to a consideration of the grave state of religion.[1] As we have seen, the substantial elements of English opinion had come, apparently with ample reason, to identify Anglo-Catholicism with Romanism,[2] and the leadership of the Church was to be hoisted upon this deadly petard of its own contrivance. The formidable Pym, who early established his leadership in the House of Commons, outlined the task which faced the committee for religion. The papists had been countenanced and encouraged in recent years, while the party which Parliament had condemned for its efforts to pervert the purity of the Church of England had been elevated to leadership.[3] The judicious Rudyerd followed to accuse the Laudian party of wilful pride and to condemn it for having brought the nation to the threshold of civil war in order to make its will prevail within the Church. "They would evaporate and dispirit the power and vigour of religion, by drawing it out into solemn, specious formalities, into obsolete antiquated ceremonies new furbish'd up."[1] All who have dared oppose their evil courses have been branded with the name of Puritan and driven from the Church. The Anglo-Catholics stand condemned by the very piety and purity of those who have been driven into exile for conscience sake.

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[1] Rushworth, John, *Historical Collections* (L., 1659–1701), IV, 19.

[2] Jordan, W. K., *Development of Religious Toleration in England, etc.*, II (L., 1936), 115 ff.

[3] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 23.

The long-restrained fear and distrust of Laud was loosed in the House of Commons. From every quarter "accusation and outcry" were raised against him and the party which he led.[2] Even the moderate members—Pym, Hampden, Falkland, and Culpepper—appeared to share the popular belief that the primate had conspired to betray the Church of England. Following Grimston's great speech of denunciation, a solemn fast was appointed for November 17th, and during the next week communion was taken by the House at St. Margaret's in order to ferret out the secret Romanists amongst the members. It was significant that Bishop Williams had, at Parliament's request, removed the communion table to the centre of the church, while intimating that he "would do the like for any parishioner in his diocese."[3]

The wrathful, if decorous, temper of the Commons found more lusty reflection in the capital. In late November Prynne and Burton, the sturdy Puritan martyrs of Laudian repression, were released after a long captivity and returned to London in a triumphal procession. They were met "some few miles from London, and brought into the city by 5,000 persons both men and women, on horseback, who, all of them, wore in their hats rosemary and bays, in token of joy and triumph."[4] Scores of Puritan ministers, who had been deprived by the ecclesiastical courts, resumed their charges to thunder at the iniquity and corruption of the Anglo-Catholic leadership of the Church.[5]

In the House of Commons, the sinister identification of the Laudian party with Romanism received apparent justification when a Catholic fanatic attempted to assassinate a Puritan justice of the peace. Pym capitalized the excitement raised by the incident to argue that the best protection of the realm and the Church against the machinations of Rome was to be found in an adequate enforcement of the penal laws.[1] In the debates that followed, suggestions were offered for remedying defects in the laws, and attention was called to the alarming increase in recusancy during the recent period of leniency.[2] Not only had recusants gone unpunished, but the Government had rendered nugatory the efforts of protestant judges to restrain missionary activity by releasing seminary priests under indictment.[3] The Commons were stirred to immediate and drastic action. Orders were issued to remove all Roman Catholic officers from the army,[4] and justices were instructed to enforce the laws against the Catholics despite any protection which they might plead under letters of pardon and grace.[5] It is highly significant that the House exhibited unanimity in the passage of these Roman Catholic measures.[6]

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[1] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 24.

[2] *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, relating to English Affairs, existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice* (L., 1864–), December 14, 1640, xxv, 102.

[3] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 53.

[4] May, Thomas, *The History of the Parliament of England, etc.* (Oxford, 1854), 79.

[5] *Ibid.*, 77.

But fatal division on the question of religion was to appear directly the Puritan majority began to push into the area of doctrinal and structural reformation of the Church. The issue was precipitated by the reception of a violently Puritan petition from several thousand London citizens demanding that episcopacy "with all its dependencies, root and branches, may be abolished."[7] The political situation was so acute as to demand unity and order in the deliberations of Parliament, and the discussion of the fateful issue was for the moment postponed. The House of Commons passed instead to a consideration of the canons recently voted by Convocation, and on this question again exhibited unanimity of opinion. Archdeacon Marler warned Hyde that the members displayed more hatred for the

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[1] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 53; *Journals of the House of Commons*, II, 37.

[2] *C.J.*, II, 38.

[3] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 68–69.

[4] *C.J.*, II, 40.

[5] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 73, 85.

[6] Gardiner, S. R., *History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War*, 1603–1642 (L., 1883), IX, 247.

[7] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 93.

Laudian canons than for Ship Money, the prime symbol of the nation's political grievances.[1] The able Fiennes swept through the canons with devastating logic and restrained invective. He charged that in the fourth canon relating to Socinianism the clergy had "assumed to themselves, a parliamentary power, in determining an heresie not determined by law, which is expressly reserved to the determination of a parliament." They had condemned Socinianism without troubling to define it, leaving "in their brests whom they will judge, and call a Socinian."[2] The clergy had arrogated to themselves an infallible and devilish power. By these canons they had conspired to destroy Christian liberty and to subject men to a dangerous tyranny. The Commons followed the lead of the Erastian Fiennes in voting on December 16, 1640, that Convocation had no power "to make any constitutions, canons, or act whatsoever in matter of doctrine, discipline, or otherwise, to bind the clergy, or the laity of the land, without common consent in parliament."[3] Though this vote was hailed as a great victory for the godly, it in fact exhibited an Erastian temper in Parliament which was, before the decade was out, to make a shambles of the ideal Christian Commonwealth of which the Puritans dreamed.

Puritan sentiment was exploiting fully the violent reaction of England to the Laudian programme. The London Root and Branch petition had tapped unsuspected sources of hatred of the episcopacy and the institutions and trappings which it had come to symbolize. This distaste was in fact focused upon the Laudian episcopacy, but the Puritan majority sought desperately to attach to the ancient institution the odium which Laud had brought upon the bishops. It was but slowly that opposition, arising from several quarters and fusing in a defensive union, began to offer effective resistance to the militancy of the Presbyterian demands. In early 1641 a stream of provincial petitions, modelled upon the earlier London diatribe, began to pour into Westminster. They assailed the episcopal leadership of the Church as "confederate with the Roman party in this land," and demanded a complete and, it should be noted, Calvinistic reformation of the government of the Church.[1] In the capital, ministers were taking full advantage of the "new freedom" to excite violence and public clamour against the established ecclesiastical order. In some churches the reading of the service was interrupted and not infrequently altar rails were pulled down and the table carried to the centre of the church.[2]

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[1] *Marler to Hyde, Calendar of the Clarendon State Papers preserved in the Bodleian Library* (ed. by C. Ogle, W. H. Bliss, W. D. Macray), (Oxford, 1869–1876), §1470.

[2] Fiennes, Nathaniel, *A second speech . . . in the Commons House of Parliament* (L., 1641), 9.

[3] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 112.

It was observed with considerable apprehension that the violence of indignant Puritanism had likewise emboldened the sectaries who were taking advantage of the existing paralysis of ecclesiastical government to launch a missionary effort quite as inimical to the Presbyterians as to the Established Church. When a group of these radicals were haled before the bar of the Lords, they denounced the parish churches as iniquitous and false while denying that the crown possessed ecclesiastical authority over the realm.[3] They were dismissed with a pious admonition to return to their parish churches, but the orthodox observed with great misgivings that on the following Sunday three or four of the peers attended their services and contributed liberally to their collection for the poor. The king felt obliged to warn Parliament that ecclesiastical disorder was rapidly getting out of hand, while "divine service is irreverently interrupted, and petitions in an ill way given in, neither disputed nor denied."[4] The clergy were dispirited[5] and gravely alarmed by the fact that the Establishment found no defenders in Parliament while its literary champions remained mute. The deadly effect of Laud's policy of coercion had stripped the Church of the leadership which could have given it adequate and historical defence.

Parliament reflected the general feeling in England that the Laudian innovations must be swept away and the Church restored to the comprehensive and tolerant ideal of Elizabeth. The unity which the "historical Anglicans" had attained with the Puritans in the early weeks of the session on these matters had, however, been wholly fortuitous. For the Puritan demands went far deeper and were calculated not only to reform the government of the Church but to orient the doctrine and thought of the Establishment more squarely upon the ideology of Geneva.[1] This party numbered amongst its adherents in Parliament some of the ablest and most aggressive of the members, while it enjoyed in the country at large a pious and influential following. But its strength was illusory. It had been formed during the period of Laudian repression of a curious amalgam of dissenting minority groups which found leadership and stamina in the stern philosophy of Calvinism. Even at the moment of its apparent predominance it was in process of dissolution into its component parts. As the shrewd Venetian ambassador observed, Parliament was singularly disunited directly it came to grips with the problem of religion: "They follow with obstinacy such a number of different sects, of Calvin, Brown and Luther, while others profess themselves Arminians, Socinians, and Protestants. Everyone studies to advance his own sect by the destruction of the others."[2]

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[1] *Petition from Kent*, in Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 135–136.

[2] Gardiner, *History of England*, IX, 266.

[3] *Journals of the House of Lords*, IV, 133–134.

[4] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 155.

[5] *Marler to Hyde*, *Clarendon State Papers*, §1503.

2. THE PURITAN ATTACK ON EPISCOPACY AND THE GROWTH OF CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION, FEBRUARY 1641–JULY 1641

The moderate party had for some time been able to forestall the dangerous debate on the episcopacy and had held Parliament's attention closely to the more pressing constitutional problems. In early February 1641, however, Sir Benjamin Rudyerd opened the fateful debate with a recommendation that the spiritual powers of the bishops should be strictly curtailed and their political power destroyed.[3] Digby joined the issue by replying, "There is no man within these walls more sensible of the heavy grievance of church government than myself, nor whose affections are keener to the clipping of these wings of the prelates, whereby they have mounted to such insolencies." The Laudian bishops, he submitted, may well be charged with great wrongs but Parliament must not destroy an ancient and worthy institution in order to repair the damage which unworthy bishops have wrought upon it. Parliament should, by the triennial act, keep at hand the lash which will restrain the bishops to their proper function.[1] Lord Falkland, the gentlest and noblest of the moderate party, supported Digby in the effort to persuade Parliament not to redress one intolerance by another. He charged the Anglo-Catholic party with a conspiracy to found in England a spiritual tyranny and to pervert the doctrine and the teachings of the Church of England. If religious liberty is to be preserved in England, the Laudian tyranny must be destroyed. But the bigotry of Puritanism must not be permitted to replace the tyranny of Anglo-Catholicism. Parliament enjoys the power and is cognizant of the duty to restore episcopacy to its apostolic dignity and usefulness and to ensure the Church against further efforts by arrogant and foolish men to pervert it to their own ends.[2]

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[1] *Vide post*, 267 ff., for a discussion of the Puritan programme and philosophy.

[2] *V.P.*, January 25, 1641, xxv, 117.

[3] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 183.

The moderate pleading of Falkland and Digby may be regarded as the final effort of gentle and sensitive men to prevent the holocaust which they had so long feared. The passion and diversity which three generations of feverish religious preoccupation and discussion had engendered in England were manifest in the speeches which followed. Almost every leader in the House rose to speak in these debates. These men were groping insensibly for some basis of unity which might preserve the Church and the nation from disaster. The stern lessons which the Erastian Elizabeth had beaten into the English consciousness were not yet wholly forgotten and her spirit seemed to brood over these momentous discussions. But the ineptitude of Stuart rule had hardened men's minds in the rigid moulds of bigotry. The Puritans had resolved to destroy episcopacy even at the peril of giving to an unworthy king a party which counted in its number the noblest spirits in England. From this day forward the moderates were driven to seek refuge in monarchy and in the Church against the rising menace of Presbyterian intolerance.[1] The moderates had offered the most consistent and effective opposition to episcopal tyranny during the previous decade and it was but reluctantly that they arrayed themselves under the standard of the king who had so implemented that tyranny. They could agree completely that "by the great power of some bishops at court" the episcopal authority "had much overflowed the banks which should have contained it, not only meddling with things that in truth were not properly within their conscience, but extending their sentences and judgments in matters triable before them beyond that degree that was justifiable." The bishops had no friends in England and since they were inflexibly opposed to any plan for the regulation of their office they played into the hands of those intent upon its destruction. The moderates during these bitter months offered the only reasoned defence of episcopacy, but they could not defend the bishops.

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[1] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 170–174.

[2] Falkland, *A speech . . . concerning episcopacy*, 7–15. *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 374–376, for a discussion of this speech in relation to Falkland's thought.

On March 1, 1641, the House of Lords ordered the abrogation of all of Laud's changes in the celebration of communion, while a committee was appointed to investigate "all innovations" introduced into the Church during recent years. The committee, under the guidance of Bishop Williams, swept critically through the doctrinal and liturgical innovations of the Anglo-Catholic party.[2] The Lower House resolved a few days later that "the legislative and judicial power of bishops . . . is a great hindrance to the discharge of their spiritual function, prejudicial to the commonwealth," and should, accordingly, be abolished.[3]

The Bishops' Exclusion Bill was somewhat modified in the Lords, where the moderates were waging a rear-guard action.[4]

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[1] For the moment a compromise was effected. Falkland and Culpepper moved that the greater part of the London petition be referred to committee, but the question of episcopacy was to be postponed for later decision (C.J., II, 81).

[2] It was reported on April 10, 1641, that Williams's committee in a session lasting two hours considered and condemned no less than fifty points of doctrine propounded and written by Arminians during recent years (*S.P. Dom., Charles I*, cccclxxix, 24, *Dr. Dell to Nicholas* (?)).

[3] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 206.

[4] Clarendon, Edward, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England, etc.* (Oxford, 1888), III, 148, 150–151, 153, 155–157.

It was there agreed that clergymen should ordinarily be excluded from participation in secular concerns but the right of the spiritual peers to hold their seats and to vote in the Upper House was upheld.[1]

The efforts of the Lords to stem the tide of Puritan reformation aroused the wrath of the extremist members and had the effect of establishing the radicals more securely in a position of leadership.[2] The Puritans enjoyed the incalculable advantage of envisaging precisely the constitution which they desired for the Church of England, while the moderate party floundered hopelessly, handicapped by the necessity of appearing to defend the Establishment which Laud had so profoundly modified. The radical group enjoyed, as well, the unenthusiastic support of Pym and the centrist party, whose energy was directed to the reform of the constitution and who would be quite content with any soundly Protestant worship which placed the clergy under strict parliamentary restraints.[3] Pym was deeply shocked by the innovations which the Anglo-Catholics had introduced into the Church of England and was resolved to destroy the mounting power of the clergy in the interests of both political and religious liberty, "yet himself industriously took care to be . . . very entire to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England."[4] The great parliamentarian was in religion a traditional Anglican who had been impelled by the excesses of Laud into the Erastian camp.

But the moderate amendments of the Lords to the Exclusion Bill lent impetus to the efforts of the radicals to destroy the bishops. On the very day when these amendments were carried in the Upper House, the zealous Dering moved in the Commons the Root and Branch Bill, which Pym had for so many weeks been able to keep off the floor. After a short but acrimonious debate it was passed to a second reading by a vote of 135–108.[5]

The moderate Anglicans were deeply stirred by the apparent strength of the Presbyterian party in Parliament and in the country at large. Unfortunately, this group, representing historical and organic Anglicanism, had been suppressed and rejected by the leadership of the Church during many years, and when it suddenly found itself charged with the defence of the Establishment, it was both unorganized and dispirited. Nevertheless the liberal Anglicans stood ready to support drastic reforms in the constitution of the Church which a generation earlier would have met all of the Puritan demands.

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[1] *L.J.*, IV, 259 (May 27, 1641).

[2] Gardiner, *History of England*, IX, 378–379.

[3] *Ibid.*, IX, 380.

[4] Clarendon, *History*, VII, 410.

[5] Gardiner, *History of England*, IX, 382. The bill was lost in the Lords on June 8, 1641. (Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 282; *S.P. Dom., Charles I*, cccclxxxi, 22.)

Somewhat earlier in the year the Secretary of State, Sir Edward Nicholas, had drafted a thoughtful memorandum which sought to arrive at such a compromise on the all-important question of church government. The Secretary indicated that an overwhelming demand for reformation existed in the House of Commons and held that, unless the peers were prepared to accept modifications in episcopal rule, serious consequences might well ensue. Parliament rightfully should share in the reconstruction of the Church, but proposals to that end should first be drafted for its consideration by a general synod of "moderate and learned men," truly representative of English and continental Protestantism. The unhappiness and dissension of England might well be regarded as affording an opportunity to forge a united Protestantism competent to engage the strength of Rome. Force and undue pressure could not be employed to this end, for a schism in English Protestantism would inevitably be the consequence of immoderate action. "Any resolution taken in passion cannot be permanent, but time will discover a necessity of fresh alterations to the shame of the whole reformation." This must be borne constantly in mind by the proposed national synod which should proceed with a high resolution to effect a permanent and comprehensive religious settlement. Its members must approach their task tolerantly and thoughtfully and may "doubtless be induced to receive satisfaction from one another in a conscientious way, and to yield to one another by the rules of charity for the public good of the church." Such a "solid course" will allay suspicion, disarm prejudice and bigotry and achieve a kind of authority in itself. It will, at the same time, powerfully implement the effort to reunite Protestantism on the fundamentals of Christianity, removing "such a division amongst ourselves as makes us appear outwardly twenty churches, or none at all."[1]

Nicholas's solid and temperate views dominated the deliberations of the committee appointed to bring in recommendations for the reformation of the government of the Church.[2] This committee included several of the great moderate bishops—Ussher, Williams, Hall, and Morton—as well as the ablest of the Puritan clergy. Under the astute guidance of Williams this group determined from the first to ground the government of the Church upon a limited episcopacy as close to the primitive model as the requirements of a national Church would permit. The committee worked under great pressure and in the midst of the bitter debates then resounding on the floor of Parliament. Their proposals were, in consequence, roughly hewn, tentative, and cumbersome, but they reflected a spirit of compromise and reasonableness which Parliament would have done well to heed. The committee recommended that every bishop be required to preach each week and to attend strictly to the performance of his spiritual duties. The bishops' judicial and administrative power was to be limited by a board of assistants appointed by the king and Parliament, in which vacancies should be filled by the king from nominees suggested by the surviving assistants. The remaining grievances in Church government were to be corrected by a commission appointed by the king and Parliament.[3]

But the tide of extremism was now running high in the House of Commons and these recommendations, which offered at least a fruitful basis for discussion, were apparently ignored. The "hot spirits" in the prelatical party remained inflexible, while "the anti-episcopal party conceived it needless to shave their beards, whose heads they intended to cut off, designing an utter extirpation of bishops."[4] With the introduction of the Root and Branch Bill the possibility of reasonable compromise came to an abrupt end and no subsequent meetings of the committee were held.

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[1] *S.P. Dom., Charles I*, ccccl xxvii, 72.

[2] *Vide ante*, 25.

[3] Fuller, Thomas, *The Church History of Britain, etc.* (Oxford, 1845), VI, 208–209.

[4] *Ibid.*, VI, 209.

3. THE DEBATES ON THE ROOT AND BRANCH BILL AND ON CHURCH GOVERNMENT; THE PROBLEM OF THE CATHOLICS AND THE SECTARIES, JULY 1641–FEBRUARY 1642

Never has Anglicanism appeared at worse advantage than during the discussions of the Root and Branch Bill in the early summer of 1641. The Laudian clergy, who had been elevated to leadership in the Church, were discredited and endangered by a vindictive popular wrath. The foremost defenders of the Church, drawn principally from the moderate and traditional Anglican camps, were paralysed by that peculiar indecision and tentativeness characteristic of liberalism in a period of grave crisis. The proponents of the bill worked feverishly to secure its passage while the constitutional party was unable to curb the reckless enthusiasm which was rapidly giving the king a party because of the deepening fissure in Parliament on the question of religion. On June 21st Vane brought in a startling Erastian proposal designed to replace episcopal government by commissioners in each diocese, who should be drawn equally from the clergy and laity.[1] Vane's suggestion gave pause to the discussion. Perhaps a majority in the House of Commons were now prepared to abolish episcopacy, but there was by no means such unanimity on the constitution of the Church which was to supplant it. No voice had as yet been raised in Parliament for a toleration of all Protestant groups. Men's hearts were attached by the tuition of conviction and by the habits of tradition to the ideal of a national Church which would permit of no dissent. One inflexibility was to be replaced by another, one uniformity by another quite as rigorous and infallible.

The groping discussion of these momentous problems in Parliament was profoundly influenced by the frenzied paper warfare in which the nation at large was engaged at this moment. There was "much murmuring in the city; the discourse of all men is they must now strike at root and branch and not slip this occasion."[2] The fanatical Puritan hatred of Anglo-Catholicism was vented in violent libels:

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[1] Gardiner, *History of England*, IX, 390.

[2] *Slingsby to* [*Sir John Penington*], *S.P. Dom.*, *Charles I*, cccclxxxi, 22 (June 10, 1641).

"Great King protect us with thy gratious hand,
Or else Arminius will oe'r spread this land; . . .
He raiseth factions, and brings in iarres,
Which broacheth errors, and upholds the wars,
The Netherland ruins he sought to bring,
In England now he doth the selfe same thing,
To raile, to write, to publish bitter gall,
To change religion and subverte us all.
His squint-eye'd looks and linsie-wolsie gowne,
Shews how religion he will soone throw downe.[1]"

Bishop Hall's temperate and thoughtful defence of episcopacy had been answered by the libellous and scurrilous Smectymnian pamphlet, which reduced the tone and manners of the controversy to the level of the market-place.[2] The great Milton joined the controversy with a series of pamphlets which compare very unfavourably indeed with the courtesy, logic, and tolerance of Hall's thought. The pulpits resounded with "sermons . . . against the bishops and their government."[3] Libel followed libel in an ever-mounting frenzy until England was engulfed in a theological controversy quite as bitter and fruitless as that which had divided Holland a generation earlier.[4]

Ecclesiastical discipline had disintegrated completely during these months, and the sects, so long held in restraint, were finding a favourable climate for the propagation of their beliefs. In the violent efforts of the rival orthodox parties to secure uniformity the sects were to discover an opportunity to create a diversity which repression was never able subsequently to destroy. Thus it is that tolerance is born of intolerance. Giustinian, the Venetian ambassador, wrote in the summer of 1641 that a condition of spiritual anarchy prevailed in England.[5] The iron grip of the Court of High Commission had been shattered and the sects were expanding with a centrifugal velocity. Parliament reflected the state of the country at large, "every one persisting obstinately in advocating the opinions of his own sect." Spiritual confusion is complete: "as every one openly professes the religious opinions which please him best, and all are tolerated, except the Catholic. Preaching in the churches is no longer confined to the ministers, but any person from the common people may venture to proclaim the forms and dogmas of the particular faith which he follows." It may be said, in truth, that there are virtually as many religions in England as there are Englishmen.[1] Bishop Hall lent confirmation to this view when he declared in his last speech in the House of Lords that there were not fewer than eighty congregations of sects in the capital alone. These sectaries are "instructed by guides fit for them, cobblers, tailors, felt-makers, and such like trash, which all were taught to spit in the face of their mother, the Church of England, and to defy and revile her government."[2]

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[1] *Englands petition, to her gratious King, etc.* (L., 1641) (s.sh.).

[2] *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration,* II, 146 ff., for a consideration of Hall's thought.

[3] *Thomas Moreton (Chester) to Sir Thomas Smith, S.P. Dom., Charles I,* ccccclxxxiii, 20 (August 6, 1641).

[4] *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration,* II, 319–349.

[5] *V.P.*, July 19, 1641, xxv, 178.

The tolerance which the sects were exploiting did not, however, extend to the Roman Catholics, who were in this period subjected to a cruel and hysterical persecution. All of the Protestant groups were at least united in fear and hatred of the Romanists, a fear which the policy of the Anglo-Catholics had further excited and which the persistent rumours of the king's connection with the Irish Rebellion appeared to confirm. The king was constrained to yield to the unanimous demand of Parliament that papists should be prohibited from frequenting the residences of the Catholic ambassadors, and a little later arrangements were made to resume the collection of the recusancy fines and to disarm them.[3] In late July 1641 a bill was passed by the Commons imposing upon every Englishman the obligation of signing a protestation which would automatically disclose secret and hence particularly dangerous recusants.[4] English citizens were being arrested upon leaving the Catholic embassies, and a systematic effort was undertaken to track down priests.[5]

Public opinion was inflamed to the point of hysteria by the hideous excesses of the Irish rebels, exaggerated by faulty communications and rumour to monstrous proportions. Rumours of "popish plots" in London constantly excited public opinion.[1] A serious riot broke out when a disorderly mob attacked communicants at mass in the queen's chapel.[2] The clamour for blood was not appeased when the king, yielding to the importunities of Henrietta Maria, revoked the death sentence that had been passed against a priest, John Goodman.[3] Opinion in Parliament and in the city was gravely exercised by this incident and it was with great difficulty that the king stood his ground, proposing to exile Goodman for life and to order all priests to quit the realm immediately under pain of death. "But so far these liberal offers have not sufficed to quiet the uproar, and it is feared that the priest will eventually come to the butcher's knife."[4]

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[1] *V.P.*, August 2, 1641, xxv, 188.

[2] *Parliamentary History*, II, 990.

[3] *Addit. MSS.*, 36913, 86; Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 275–277.

[4] Gardiner, *History of England*, IX, 413. When this absurd measure was rejected by the House of Lords (July 29) impeachment proceedings were immediately instituted against thirteen bishops. (Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 377.)

[5] *V.P.*, May 31, 1641, xxv, 154.

The plight of the Romanists grew steadily worse during 1641. Riots were not infrequent, and the Lord Mayor was obliged to provide guards for the embassies of the Catholic powers.[5] During May, Giustinian was seriously alarmed, fearing that the lives of the Catholic envoys were in grave danger.[6] Inflammatory libels were being circulated urging the stamping out of all idolatry even in the embassies. The homes of leading Catholics in the provinces were being attacked and the life of the queen was believed to be in danger.[7] Parliament had resolved to compel all suspected Romanists to take the Elizabethan Oath of Supremacy and those who declined faced imprisonment or worse. It was clearly the intention of Parliament to destroy Catholicism in England. The Catholic lords at court had been dismissed, the queen's Capuchins had been ordered out of the realm, her chapel had been dismantled, and Catholics had been warned to remain within five miles of their legal residence.[1] The Catholics, harassed by mounting persecutions, were in despair and many were fleeing abroad. Only the tolerant and conservative disposition of the House of Lords, Giustinian felt, prevented a holocaust.[2]

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[1] *S.P. Dom.*, *Charles I*, cccclxxxv, 114 (November 25, 1641).

[2] *V.P.*, November 30, 1640, xxv, 97.

[3] *Ibid.*, February 8, 1641, xxv, 119. Goodman was a brother to the notorious Bishop of Gloucester who had been converted to Rome some years earlier.

[4] *V.P.*, February 8, 1641, xxv, 119. The king was obliged to place the matter of the priest's sentence in the jurisdiction of Parliament, while warning the Houses that any persecution of his Catholic subjects would inevitably lead to regrettable retaliations abroad. (*V.P.*, xxv, 123.)

[5] *V.P.*, xxv, 145–146.

[6] *Ibid.*, May 16, 1641, xxv, 148–149.

[7] *Ibid.*, xxv, 152.

In the autumn the Catholic situation reached a crisis. Deeply stirred by rebellion overseas, the House of Commons resolved "that they would never give consent to any toleration of the popish religion in Ireland, or in any other his majesty's dominions."[3] The crown was no longer strong enough to protect condemned priests and several executions occurred, the first in a period of thirteen years. In July 1641, Edward Barbour, a Benedictine, was hanged in Lancashire,[4] and in the next month a secular priest was put to death at Tyburn despite the strenuous exertions of the queen on his behalf.[5] Parliament petitioned the king in December to permit the execution of seven additional priests who lay under sentence, but Charles declined to sanction an indiscriminate butchery.[6] Despite his resolution, however, two priests were put to death in January 1642,[7] and at least seven others paid the extreme penalty before the year was out.[8] Giustinian realized that the balance of power in England had passed from the Crown to Parliament and lamented the fact that his co-religionists had cast their lot so completely with the monarchy. He regarded the Puritans, quite correctly, as the irreconcilable enemies of the Church, and the religious developments which were then occurring in Parliament would have convinced even a less objective observer that a Calvinistic State Church was now at hand in England.

The discussions of the past two years had profoundly stirred England. Religious freedom, though still rejected in theory by most Englishmen, "silently pushed its way, and there was scarcely a possible form of church worship or government which some Englishmen were not ready to defend."[1] None the less, the men of the period continued to be preoccupied with the ideal of an exclusive church system which would permit no dissent, not yet realizing that the anarchistic forces implicit in Protestantism had already done their deadly work and that the only solution to the religious impasse in which England found herself lay in the acceptance of religious toleration. Several shrewd minds in Parliament had come to realize the inevitability of this fact, but the time was not yet propitious to embrace this position resolutely.

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[1] *S.P. Dom., Charles I,* cccclxxxv, 92; *V.P.,* June 21, 1641, xxv, 165; July 6, 1641, xxv, 174.

[2] *Ibid.,* July 19, 1641, xxv, 179.

[3] Rushworth, *Historical Collections,* IV, 455.

[4] *S.P. Dom., Charles I,* cccclxxxii, 95 (July 29, 1641).

[5] *V.P.,* August 9, 1641, xxv, 195; Gardiner, *History of England,* IX, 411.

[6] *C.J.,* II, 343; *S.P. Dom., Charles I,* cccclxxxvi, 63 (December 16, 1641).

[7] *V.P.,* January 31, 1642, xxv, 285.

[8] Law, T. G., ed., *A Calendar of the English Martyrs of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (L., 1876).

The committee charged with religious affairs returned to the problem of church government during the summer of 1641. Vane, who was still the leading member, was warned by the experienced and moderate Sir Thomas Roe that his committee should weigh most carefully its apparent determination to destroy episcopacy. This decision, he submitted, appears to solve the pressing problem of reforming and cleansing the Laudian episcopate, but Parliament sees "but a little way, neither in time nor place . . . distractions will arise in that church that hath no government."[2] In the deliberations of the committee the powerful Erastian intelligence of Selden was beginning to exert the influence which was to be so ruinous to the plans of the godly. Vane's earlier scheme of church government was abandoned for a completely Erastian recommendation which would have charged lay commissioners, to be named by Parliament, with the administration of the Church.[3] The growing Erastian party in Parliament, now thoroughly apprehensive at the prospects of a Presbyterian government, was clearly endeavouring to find a formula which would provide a large measure of religious freedom by denying to any religious organization the sanctions of exclusive spiritual jurisdiction.

Though Parliament had displayed no ability to agree upon a constitution for the Church, it pushed forward eagerly to the correction of long-standing religious grievances. The Court of High Commission was abolished, Laud's hateful innovations in the ritual were swept away, and defamation of the sabbath was prohibited.[1] In a few weeks the principal Puritan demands of the past sixty years were attained. Unfortunately, however, Puritanism was rapidly hardening into Presbyterianism, and the present aspirations of the reformed party were far from fulfilled. When in September numerous alterations were suggested in the Book of Common Prayer a storm of protest rose to confront the grimly determined Puritan leadership. The moderate Anglicans had been quite prepared to consent to the reformation of abuses which had for so many years distracted the Church and the realm. But the Prayer Book was the symbol of historical Anglicanism, and, led by the brilliant Culpepper, the forces opposed to the Presbyterians rallied to defeat the recommendations by a narrow majority.[2]

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[1] Gardiner, *History of England*, X, 12.

[2] *S.P. Dom.*, *Charles I*, cccclxxxiii, 4 (August 3, 1641).

[3] The bill was shelved in August because of the crisis precipitated by the king's departure for Scotland.

The Anglican strength in Parliament was centred in the House of Lords. The peers during these weeks were striving desperately to retain the historical structure of the Church. It was tacitly admitted that the Laudian innovations must be swept away, but the Upper House was resolved to prevent fundamental changes in the Anglican system.[3] Accordingly, a resolution was carried, setting aside the changes recently proposed in the Commons, which sought to preserve the traditional worship of the Church. The conservative temper of the Upper House was driving the Commons to claim in the spiritual sphere precisely that sovereignty which they were about to arrogate in the political.

The members returned to Westminster in October, after the summer recess, considerably sobered by the heightening political crisis. The moderate constitutional leadership was able to assert itself again and an earnest effort was made to conciliate the Lords. Further consideration of the Root and Branch Bill was abandoned and no attempt was made to press further the bill for reformation which the peers had rejected in the previous session. A bill was introduced, instead, for the abolition of the temporal power of the clergy and the exclusion of the bishops from the House of Lords.[1] Since this proposal had in the earlier sessions of the Long Parliament enjoyed the support of the moderate Anglicans, Pym hoped that it might find favour in the House of Lords as a compromise measure. During the debates the able, if volatile, Sir Edward Dering raised his voice in protest against the growing Erastianism of Parliament and called for a national synod to compose the religious problem. "We may sit here and debate ourselves," he argued, "and the world abroad, into more and more distances of opinion; we are not likely to work ourselves into unity."[2]

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[1] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 303; *C.J.*, II, 279; *S.P. Dom.*, *Charles I*, cccclxxxiv, 13.

[2] *C.J.*, II, 279–281.

[3] Thus it was resolved that images erected prior to 1621 were to be left standing. It is probably no coincidence that Laud was created a bishop in 1621.

The effort of the moderates to arrive at an understanding with the Lords on the question of church government proved fruitless. The peers, buttressed by the solid phalanx of episcopal votes, were alarmed by the growing political radicalism of the Puritan Commons and were gravely disturbed by the rapid and unchecked spread of sectarianism.[3] To forfeit the twenty-six conservative votes of the spiritual peers would be to surrender to Pym's larger political and ecclesiastical plans. The Lords consequently declined to consider Pym's request that the bishops should not be permitted to vote on the question of their own exclusion,[4] and postponed indefinitely the further consideration of the bill.[5] Northumberland, writing two days after this decision, disclosed the real sentiment of the Upper House when he said, "The bill for removing the bishops out of our house sticks there, and whether we shall get it passed or not is very doubtful, unless some assurance be given that the ruling out of the function is not afterwards intended."[1]

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[1] *C.J.*, II, 291.

[2] Some months later Dering was expelled from the House of Commons for his intemperate language during the debate on the *Grand Remonstrance.* At the same time his book on the religious question was ordered burned. Dering left a rough memorandum concerning the circumstances of his expulsion (*Proceedings, principally in the County of Kent, etc.* (L., 1862), 74–76), which extols the inviolability of reason and free enquiry. Dering accused Parliament of making "an idoll of the omnipotent power of legislation." He warned the House of Commons that his book, which had been burned, would do the "cause of root and branch" more damage than it ever had before. "You have burnt my booke, and thereby raysed the price, and raised the desires of such as would have [it]. Alas, the burning of my booke cannot confute me, nor silence me in the way I go. Itt is not in the power of the house to confute me, though you shuld burne me with my booke; but itt is in the wisdome of the house to confute me; for I will ever be the servant, the slave of reason." (P. 75.)

[3] *S.P. Dom., Charles I,* cccclxxxv, 72.

[4] *C.J.*, II, 295.

[5] *L.J.*, IV, 407 (October 27, 1641).

It was now evident to the constitutional party that a hopeless impasse had been reached. Pym therefore resolved to carry the parliamentary position to the country in the *Grand Remonstrance*. The *Remonstrance* was brought to the floor for consideration on November 16th,[2] and despite Dering's masterly attack on the ecclesiastical clauses[3] it was carried on November 22nd by a vote of 159–148.

The religious clauses of the *Remonstrance* present a restrained and judicious statement of the moderate Puritan position in late 1641. The bishops and the Anglo-Catholic party were accused of having shown dangerous and illegal favour to popery and of having weakened the resources of Protestantism by a systematic effort to eradicate the Puritan element in the Church. In the House of Lords this party, assisted by the Catholic peers, had steadily opposed all remedies calculated to reform and strengthen the Church.[4] The House of Commons, the *Remonstrance* maintained, had no desire to relax the bounds of discipline, but it did insist that the temporal power of the bishops must be destroyed in order to free them for the prosecution of their neglected spiritual duties. The Church must be preserved, disorder and sectarianism must be repressed, and a frame of government must be reared in which conformity and uniformity could be enforced under the laws.

The *Grand Remonstrance* contributed but slightly to the clarification of the religious quarrel and nothing to its solution. It based its argument upon the familiar denunciation of Anglo-Catholicism, with which most Englishmen would agree, but it offered no positive suggestions for amendment and reconstruction. A National Church was clearly envisaged, but the slender majority which passed the measure was itself hopelessly divided on the question of what Church and what discipline. The possibility of religious toleration as the solution to the dilemma was nervously disavowed in the almost frantic renunciation by all the parliamentary groups of responsibility for the spread of sectarianism. England was to remain poised upon the horns of this dilemma until sectarianism had rooted itself widely and securely. Religious toleration was then embraced as the only remaining instrument competent to fuse the diverse elements of revolution.

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[1] *S.P. Dom.*, *Charles I*, cccclxxxv, 76 (November 12, 1641).

[2] *C.J.*, II, 316–317.

[3] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 425 ff.

[4] *S.P. Dom.*, *Charles I*, cccclxxxvi, 36 (December 10, 1641).

The publication of the *Grand Remonstrance* had the desired effect of exciting public opinion into an irresistible demand for the passage of the Exclusion Bill. In fact, public pressure became in these weeks embarrassing even to the radical groups in the House of Commons. In early December it was reported that "some factious people have been in a tumultuary way about the Houses crying down bishops and the Book of Common Prayer."[1] On the following day Slingsby reported to Sir John Penington that these same citizens "begin to come again to the House with their swords by their sides, hundreds in companies; their pretence is only against Episcopacy. One of the House was strictly examined by them of which side he was, in such a manner that, with good words, he was glad to slip from them."[2] The *Remonstrance* received fervent support in a petition originating in the capital which was presented in Parliament on December 11th. The petitioners complained that the "popish lords and bishops" had been perverse in their opposition to the passage of reforming statutes, and charged, somewhat hysterically, that they had refused to permit the weeding out of a sinister popish plot which prevented any man from "following his trade cheerfully while the lives of himself and family and the safety of the kingdom are in danger."[3]

The Puritan members employed to full advantage these manifestations of popular support. They were daily growing more inflexible in their demands. An observer complained with some justice that there was no hope of peace and quiet in England until religion should be settled to their complete satisfaction.[4] The king's ill-timed proclamation enjoining the land to observe the ecclesiastical laws was answered by a petition from several leading Puritan ministers in the capital which defended the principle of liberty of conscience, or, to be more exact, the liberty of Puritan consciences. The petitioners declared that Convocation reflected the sentiments of the bishops rather than of the clergy, and demanded the convention of a national synod to be charged with the framing of a reformed constitution for the Church. They declared that they were unable in conscience to employ the Book of Common Prayer, and expressed their intention to exercise personal discretion and liberty in those matters which Parliament regarded as in need of reconsideration.[1]

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[1] *S.P. Dom., Charles I,* ccccxxxvi, 8 (December 1, 1641).

[2] *Ibid.*, cccclxxxvi, 14.

[3] *Ibid.*, cccclxxxvi, 42; *et cf. C.J.*, II, 339.

[4] *S.P. Dom., Charles I,* cccclxxxvi, 90.

Pressure from these orthodox sources was by no means displeasing to the Puritan leadership in the House of Commons. But the virus of free discussion and enquiry was having an effect quite as distasteful to them as to the defenders of the Church. Sectarianism was becoming more powerful and articulate as an unwelcome temporary ally of Puritanism in the attack on the bishops. On December 19th a sectarian fanatic was thrown into prison, while, on the same day, Praise-God-Barebones was barely rescued from an angry mob to which he had been preaching. During the following week it seemed probable that military force might have to be employed to restore order.[2] The situation got completely out of hand when Archbishop Williams was roughly handled in a serious riot in which several persons were seriously injured.[3] The withdrawal of the bishops from the House of Lords and their imprisonment followed as a consequence of this period of popular excitement.[4]

Parliamentary government in the traditional meaning of the term came to an abrupt end with the factual exclusion of the bishops. Conservative resistance in Parliament had been broken and was re-forming itself under the banner of the king as royalist resistance. The Civil War was almost at hand. In February 1642, the Bishops Exclusion Bill was passed, while on the same day an observer reported that "many of the popish and malignant party . . . begin now to leave the Houses, and retire to their houses in the country out of a panic fear of the multitude, who from all the counties come daily in thousands with petitions to the Houses."[1] The king, who was still at Windsor when the bill was carried in the Lords, was urged by his advisers to accept it. They represented that therein lay the only hope for the preservation of the Church and the retention of at least some semblance of episcopacy, for all parties were combined in opposition to the bishops.[2] The king gave his consent, thereby enormously strengthening his strategic position since the moderate party in Parliament desired to go this far and no farther in the reconstruction of the Church of England. The Puritans were now prepared to frame church government after their own tastes. Their sturdy effort on behalf of Calvinism was to raise up against them forces which were within a few years to shatter forever their dream of an ideal Christian commonwealth and to make impossible thereafter any more than a pretension to an exclusive church system in England.

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[1] Nalson, J., *An Impartial Collection of the Great Affairs of State* (L., 1682–1683), II, 764–766.

[2] *S.P. Dom., Charles I*, cccclxxxvi, 99.

[3] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, IV, 463–464.

[4] *S.P. Dom., Charles I*, cccclxxxvi, 111.

Parliament had demonstrated, during the past two years, substantial agreement in the reforms and amendments which it desired to effect in the constitution of the Church. The very violence of its debates, however, had revealed the great difficulty in ordering a new ecclesiastical system without the leadership of an intelligent and purposeful government. From time to time members had proposed the creation of a national synod which would be vested by Parliament with the power of discussing and recommending a godly and uniform Protestant Establishment. Since it was becoming evident that Parliament was doomed to flounder indefinitely in a morass of theological discussion if it attempted to frame the ideal Establishment, this proposal won favour with the godly because it confirmed their confidence in the revealing illumination which God bestows upon an assembly of the saints; and with the Erastians because they regarded the theological wrangling as a waste of time, as excessively dangerous, and as a labyrinth from which there was no issue.

In view of these circumstances Parliament on April 8, 1642, sought to clarify its position on the question of church government. Its instincts were conservative, and no leniency was displayed towards licentiousness or disorder. A sound reformation of the government and liturgy of the Church was held to be necessary, but nothing was to be destroyed that was not "evil and justly offensive, or at least unnecessary and burdensome." In the pursuit of this end the Houses resolved to consult with godly and learned divines.[1] But parliamentary control was not to be relaxed. It was agreed that the divines should be nominated by the knights and burgesses from the several shires,[2] while the functions of the Assembly were to be limited to consultation and advice.[3] Parliament's satisfaction with this arrangement was shown when in the *Nineteen Propositions* to the king it demanded that the government and liturgy of the Church be settled as Parliament should determine in consultation with the Assembly of Divines which it had resolved to convene.[4] Parliament had grasped the sovereignty in religious matters. It now proposed to mould the Church according to its own conception and to compel the nation to accept its definition.[5]

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[1] *S.P. Dom., Charles I*, ccccIxxxix, 14 (February 8, 1642).

[2] Clarendon, *History*, IV, 299.

It was apparent, however, that the religious constitution could not be framed *in vacuo*. Political necessity required Scottish military assistance and the Scots were grimly determined to bestow upon England the benefits of a truly godly Church and discipline. The Scottish General Assembly had voted that unity in religion should be a prerequisite of political co-operation, and Scottish commissioners were empowered to water and train the tender plant of English Presbyterianism. In early September the Commons voted, with a wholly suspicious unanimity, to assure the Scots of their determination to proceed towards a unity of faith and of their resolution to abolish episcopacy in England.[6] Parliament expressed the high intention of erecting a truly reformed Church in England which would protect truth against the ravages of popery on the one hand and secure it against sectarianism on the other.[1]

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[1] *L.J.*, IV, 706.

[2] *C.J.*, II, 534, 535; *S.P. Dom.*, *Charles I*, ccccxc, 17.

[3] The scheme aroused considerable enthusiasm. Sir William Boswell wrote to Roe on May 2, 1642, "I hear the Commons hasten, and the divines . . . are as hot upon it and as hasty as they." (*S.P. Dom.*, *Charles I*, ccccxc, 30.)

[4] May, *History of Parliament*, 192. A bill giving effect to this resolution was introduced into the House of Commons on October 15th. (*C.J.*, II, 809.) It was taken up immediately in the Lords, where it was passed on the 18th with several amendments (*L.J.*, V, 406), which were accepted immediately by the Lower House. (*L.J.*, V, 407.)

[5] Gardiner, *History of England*, X, 198.

[6] *C.J.*, II, 754.

With war at hand, a final consultation was undertaken with the king at Oxford in the forlorn hope of arriving at an understanding. The possibility of compromise had in fact long since disappeared, and neither side neglected its preparations for war during the discussions. Charles, in his message to the parliamentary leaders, declared himself ready to accept any salutary acts which the Houses might propose for the suppression of popery and the preservation of the Established Church. In particular, he would welcome legislation designed to preserve the Book of Common Prayer and check the insolence of the "Brownists, Anabaptists" and other sectaries.[2] He reiterated his willingness legally to protect the consciences of his subjects in matters of ceremony which in "the judgment of most men" should be regarded as indifferent, provided the dissenters deported themselves modestly and quietly.[3]

The king's vague concessions were scarcely calculated to bridge the void now separating the High Anglican position from the Puritan. Parliament lent them scarcely a contemptuous consideration, hurrying forward with the task of completing its programme of reformation in accordance with the dictates of the Puritan conscience and Scottish demands. In January 1643, the bill abolishing episcopal government in England was rushed through the now emasculated Houses.[4] At the same time, Roman Catholic worship was effectively suppressed in the area under parliamentary control despite the apprehension of the Lords.[5] The Established Church was dealt with almost as violently. In October 1642, a riot had occurred at St. Paul's between the Anglican worshippers and the Puritans, when the latter attempted to destroy the organ.[6] Anglican services were forcibly broken up and on one occasion two persons were killed.[7] London was swept by a savage wave of iconoclasm which Parliament sanctioned by the appointment of a committee charged with the destruction of superstitious monuments. On April 25, 1643, the monuments and decorations of Westminster Abbey and St. Margaret's were demolished.[1] A few days later Parliament confirmed an order of the London Council for the levelling of the historic Cheapside Cross and "the obliterating of all other popish monuments" within the city. This order was extended in August of the same year to the "utter demolishing and removing of all monuments of idolatry and superstition out of all churches and chappels in England and Wales."[2]

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[1] *L.J.*, V, 349.

[2] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, V, 169; *C.J.*, II, 958.

[3] Gardiner, S. R., *History of the Great Civil War* (L., 1904), I, 90.

[4] *C.J.*, II, 947; *L.J.*, V, 569, 572.

[5] *V.P.*, xxvi, 156, 258, 262.

[6] *V.P.*, October 24, 1642, xxvi, 182.

[7] *Ibid.*, March 6, 1643, xxvi, 249.

Puritan enthusiasm for reformation was, in the absence of concerted opposition, rapidly being translated into bigotry. The Puritans had complained bitterly of the suppression of Laud's licensing system, yet Parliament, alarmed by the really enormous increase in pamphlet literature, set up a censorship designed to be quite as stringent in its effects. A strongly Puritan board of control was appointed which was charged with the licensing of all books on divinity.[3] The efforts of Parliament to impose a rigid censorship during the period of the Civil War were never to be successful owing to the impetus which theological discussion had already gained and to the unbelievable ideological confusion of the period, but an earnest effort was undertaken to achieve precisely that effect.

The break with the king was now irrevocable and Parliament determined to set up the Assembly of Divines which it had contemplated for so many months. The bill giving that body legal sanction was passed as an Ordinance on the novel constitutional grounds that Parliament might legally bind the realm "when the kingdom's good is so much concerned," and the "king refuseth, and wholly absenteth himself from the Parliament."[4] The roster of members was set out, following an earlier list which had been presented to the king shortly after the *Grand Remonstrance*.[5] But events had progressed so far that no one could reasonably expect the Anglican nominees to take seats, and it was assumed that the body would represent militant Puritanism.[1] The Parliamentary Ordinance empowered the Assembly "to confer and treat amongst themselves, of such matters and things, touching and concerning the liturgie, discipline, and government of the Church of England . . . as shall be proposed unto them by both or either of the houses of parliament," and to deliver to Parliament advice touching those concerns that "shall be most agreeable to the Word of God."[2] Its scope, then, was explicitly limited to such questions as Parliament should choose to delegate to the Assembly, while its function was carefully restricted to advice and consultation. The shrewd Venetian envoy observed that it had been called into existence because of the high necessity of bringing some order out of the confusion of religions which had arisen in England. "But," he concluded, "the wisest think that when this synod meets it will temporize, since it does not suit the present politicians, before the temporal government is settled, to offend the followers of other sects, who yet serve their cause, since the Catholic faith is the only one detested."[3]

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[1] Gardiner, *Civil War*, I, 132.

[2] *A Perfect Diurnall of some passages in Parliament*, May 8, 1643.

[3] *Ibid.*, August 28, 1643; *L.J.*, VI, 96, 97; *vide* Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, V, 336, for the membership of the board.

[4] May, *History of Parliament*, 287–288; *L.J.*, VI, 84.

[5] Scobell, Henry, *A Collection of Acts and Ordinances, etc.* (L., 1658), I, 42–44.

B. The Triumph of Presbyterianism, 1643–1645

1. THE ASSEMBLY OF DIVINES; THE BEGINNINGS OF INDEPENDENT-ERASTIAN RESISTANCE TO THE CALVINISTIC IDEAL, JUNE 1643–JANUARY 1644

The Assembly of Divines held its first session on July 1, 1643, with sixty-nine of the designated members in attendance.[4] It laid its first recommendation before Parliament a few days later when it urged upon its members the high necessity of completing the reformation of the Church along strictly Puritan lines. In particular, "all monuments of idolatry and superstition, but more especially the whole body and practice of popery," should be totally abolished.[5] These demands had long constituted the heart of the Puritan programme for the reformation of the Church and probably enjoyed the approval of the majority of the English people. But English Puritanism had likewise become persuaded in the period of Laud's ascendancy that the nation could be saved to Protestantism only by the substitution of a Genevan discipline and government for the decidedly amorphous structure of the Anglican Establishment. English Puritanism had been driven to embrace Presbyterianism, and to this inevitable development there was now added steady and irresistible pressure from the Scots. Scotland was determined to impose its system upon England, and the desperate Parliament was prepared to accept it, at least in theory, as the price of military aid. But neither side in this quite unspiritual transaction fully understood the intentions of the other. The Scots were absorbed with considerations of faith; Parliament with the high necessities of politics. When Parliament understood fully the direction which English Presbyterianism was assuming, a desperate struggle ensued to check the forces of bigotry which the members had permitted free rein as the price of military and political unity. Parliament came to realize that a commodity may be purchased with coin of too great value.

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[1] Clark, H. W., *History of English Nonconformity, etc.* (L., 1911–1913), I, 332.

[2] *Perfect Diurnall*, June 12, 1643; Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, V, 337–338.

[3] *V.P.*, June 26, 1643, xxvi, 289.

[4] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, V, 339.

[5] *Ibid.*, V, 345.

English commissioners were dispatched to Scotland late in the summer of 1643 to discuss the terms of agreement.[1] Henderson, the great Scottish leader, demanded that the two nations should engage in the support of a Solemn Covenant for the preservation of the reformed religion, which should define as explicitly as possible the true faith whose defence they were about to undertake.[2] The Churches of both nations should be brought into a close uniformity in structure, doctrine, government, and discipline. It was clear, since England was still labouring to define the Church, that the Scottish model was implied. To this implication the wily and completely Erastian Sir Henry Vane, who had somehow insinuated himself into the confidence of the Scots, took immediate and unanswerable exceptions, proposing that the English reformation should found itself directly upon the Word of God rather than upon its secondary reflection in the Scottish order. This apparently innocent reservation was capable of infinite exploitation by those moderate and Erastian Englishmen who subsequently found it necessary to disengage Parliament from the pious undertakings of the Solemn League and Covenant.

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[1] Of the clerical members of the commission, Stephen Marshall represented the moderate Puritan tradition, while the other, Philip Nye, had already embraced the theory of toleration and the principles of Independency.

[2] Baylie, Robert, *Letters and Journals* (Edinburgh, 1841), II, 88–89.

In late August the commissioners laid the Covenant before the Assembly and Parliament for approval. Its passage by the almost solidly Puritan Assembly was foreordained, but not before the document had been subjected to a critical examination from the floor. Dr. Cornelius Burgess, the highly respected vice-president of the Assembly, was suspended for his attack on the intemperate clause denouncing prelacy and error.[1] The Assembly declared its understanding that in subscribing to the Covenant no man engaged himself to maintain the Church of Scotland save as his own conscience conceived it to be in accordance with the Word of God. This highly important reservation having been made, the Assembly declared unanimously that the Covenant was "agreeable to sound truth and a good conscience," and recommended it to the earnest consideration of Parliament.[2]

In the House of Commons Pym gave his powerful support to the Covenant because he appreciated the absolute necessity of Scottish military aid.[3] He took the position that the form of church government was of small moment and that undue disagreement and violence on this question must not be permitted to distract men from the more pressing and important issues of civil and religious liberty. Vane's earlier reservation was retained in so far as it applied to the reformation of the Church of England, and with unimportant amendments the Covenant was adopted by the two Houses in the name of England.[1] A joint session of the Commons and the Assembly of Divines was arranged for September 25th in order to take the Covenant. The sermon of the day, preached by the brilliant and dissenting Nye, forcibly expressed the view that the action of Parliament could in no sense be interpreted as binding England to the adoption of the Presbyterian system. Religious truth may be found only in the Word of God and no man can be bound when his judgment and faith rest upon that word. The members then came forward into the chancel of the historic church to take the Covenant.[2]

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[1] *Perfect Diurnall*, September 8, 1643. In the session of August 28, 1643, Burgess attacked the clauses of the Covenant pledging aid in the extirpation of popery, prelacy, heresy, and schism. He held that the terms were loosely defined, "it being a very nice business to know what popery is, and what is meant by extirpation, and I know not what." (Lightfoot, John, *Journal of the Assembly*, *Works* (L., 1823–4), XIII, 11.) He was joined by several other moderate members who made various exceptions while attempting to delay the acceptance of the offending clause. Burgess was particularly concerned because of the dangerous construction which might be placed on "prelacy." He was overruled and suspended from the Assembly until he had made apology. (*Ibid.*, XIII, 13.)

[2] *Perfect Diurnall*, September 14, 1643.

[3] Gardiner, *Civil War*, I, 233.

The parliamentary moderates had surrendered on the question of religion in the interests of politics. The Presbyterians had been led to believe that England was now prepared to embrace the tenets and discipline of Geneva. Heartened by the almost miraculous accretion of power and prestige which Presbyterianism had gained in England, the Westminster Assembly passed immediately to the task of framing a church constitution which would secure to the nation a truly reformed Church whose discipline would check decisively the mounting strength of sectarianism.

The Westminster Assembly was almost solidly Puritan, and that had come to mean Presbyterian. Of the 120 clerical members who took seats and of the 30 lay members, very few were Anglicans.[3] The great historian of the Church, Fuller, regretted this fact, since, though they would have been a tiny minority in the body, "their learning and abilities, their temper and moderation, might have conduced much to mitigate some violence and extremity in their proceedings."[4] Far more influential and vexatious to the dominant Presbyterian temper of the body was the small knot of Independent leaders in the Assembly who for some months maintained the struggle for religious liberty in England almost unassisted by Parliament. Following the return of the exiled Independent leaders,[1] opposition to Presbyterian dominance grew apace. The Independents immediately began to found churches,—"they did pick hence a master, thence a mistress of a family, a son out of a third, a servant out of a fourth parish, all which met together in their congregation."[2] Despite the efforts in Parliament of Cromwell and Hazlerigg on their behalf,[3] however, the number of Independents in the Assembly was never more than twelve.

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[1] *Perfect Diurnall*, September 2, 1643, September 11, 1643.

[2] On this day 112 members of the House of Commons subscribed (Gardiner, *Civil War*, I, 235), and during the succeeding months 116 more were persuaded or coerced into subscription. (*Perfect Diurnall*, September 30, 1643, February 12, 1644.)

[3] Fuller, *Church History*, VI, 251.

[4] *Ibid.*, VI, 252.

The Independent leaders, having been nurtured in persecution, detected before any other significant party the grave danger which religious liberty would experience from the attempt of the Presbyterians to impose an exclusive and rigid church system upon the realm. As Fuller shrewdly observed, the Presbyterians, "who desired most ease and liberty for their sides when bound with episcopacy, now girt their own government the closest about the consciences of others."[4] They detected in Independency, already embracing the heteredox teaching of toleration, the most formidable threat to their own dominance and they were accordingly resolved to eradicate it from England. In the face of this resolution the leaders of Independency were rapidly formulating a philosophy, a scheme of government, and consummate defensive tactics.[5] The paucity of their number was compensated by the energy and ability of their leadership.[6] The five dissenting brethren were veteran disputants and seasoned writers, and were imbued with an heroic and implacable resolution to prevent the riveting of another system of intolerance upon England to replace the one only now in process of destruction. They declared that they had discovered a firm middle ground between the laxity of separatism and the iron rigour of Presbyterianism,[7] and they sought to rally England to that position in order to preserve it from the horrors of religious conflict. Standing firm upon the principle of religious freedom, the Independents were to recapitulate the history of Puritanism in the previous decade. Independency became the focal point around which the various sects and minority groups, threatened by Presbyterian intolerance, were to rally, gaining before many years had elapsed sufficient strength and unity of purpose to demolish at the moment of its fruition the ecclesiastical structure which the Presbyterians had elaborated with Calvinistic honesty and thoroughness in the deliberations of the Westminster Assembly.

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[1] *Vide post*, 353–356.

[2] Fuller, *Church History*, VI, 281.

[3] Dale, R. W., *History of English Congregationalism* (L., 1907), 265.

[4] Fuller, *Church History*, VI, 282.

[5] *Vide post*, 347–451, for the discussion of Independent thought.

[6] Baylie, writing in 1645, estimated their number in England at not more than 1,000, but commented, "setting aside number, for other respects they are of so eminent a condition, that not any nor all the rest of the sects are comparable to them." (Baylie, Robert, *A dissuasive from the errours of the time* (L., 1645), 53.)

[7] Gardiner, *Civil War*, I, 261.

It will be recalled that the act constituting the Westminster Assembly had carefully restricted its capacity to an advisory and consultative role. But the Assembly rapidly carved out for itself a far greater influence. It proceeded with no trace of hesitation or doubt to frame a stern and inflexible discipline which it proposed to fasten upon England. In the confusion and disorder of the moment the absolute certainty and the calm resolution of Presbyterianism made it the symbol of order in an age which feared sectarian anarchy and confusion. The sects were rallying with Independency around the principle of religious liberty, and the deliberations of the Assembly were haunted by the "red spectre of toleration." The Assembly appeared, then, to represent the principles of conservatism and tradition and hence gained, for a time at least, the support of many men who were by no means enthusiastic for the godly commonwealth. Parliament was gravely disturbed by religious disorder following upon the collapse of the Anglican system and, feeling itself in some obscure way responsible, was strongly tempted to lend support to the one communion which promised security, order, and propriety. As Lord Morley has so aptly expressed the parliamentary dilemma: "a statesman responsible for order naturally paused before committing himself to a system that might only mean that the members of rival communions would fly at one another's throats."[1]

It was but gradually that sane and reasonable men came to see that uniformity of religion was no longer possible in England either in theory or in fact. Sectarianism and indifference, long firmly rooted in England, had attained during the months of incipient revolution their maturity and were resolved to gain for themselves not only breathing space but growing space. Presbyterianism set its face inflexibly against this irreducible core of sectarian resistance. Its theory was not cut of cloth to fit the realities of the English situation, and in its obstinate inflexibility lay the sources of its own ruin. The Assembly claimed for Presbyterianism a role in English religious life which it did not and could not fill. The result was, in the ever pregnant words of Fuller, that it was "staked down, and tied up with a shorter tedder."[1] Parliament held in its grasp the reins of tight control, while the Erastians showed them that "praemunire is a rod as well for a Presbyter as a prelate . . . though they felt not this rod; it was shewed to them, and shaked over them."[2]

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[1] Morley, John, *Oliver Cromwell* (L., 1900), 163.

In October 1643, the Assembly began its momentous discussion of the delicate and explosive question of church government. Opposition to the Covenant was already strong in the army and was becoming articulate in the nation at large. An intemperate petition against Presbyterianism had been drafted and only the strenuous exertions of the Independent leaders, who still hoped that some accommodation for dissent could be gained from the Assembly, secured its withdrawal. The Independent divines had striven to restrain pressure from their own ranks but on the floor of the Assembly they waged a daring and relentless war against the Presbyterian majority. Masters of biblical learning, they sought to remind the Assembly that it had been convened to frame for England a Church and a church government based upon the infallible Word of God without reference to any existing ecclesiastical system. The Presbyterians replied that they had at hand such a system of infallible truth. They assumed from the beginning that even the criticism of their premises was a species of heresy. The Assembly had dedicated itself to the high task of setting up Presbyterianism in England, not to the search for abstract truth.

The resistance of the Independent leaders to this resolution had the immediate effect of establishing a rallying point for all parties that had anything to fear from Presbyterian intolerance.

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[1] Fuller, *Church History*, VI, 287.

[2] *Ibid.*, VI, 287–288.

At this early date the Independents were indistinguishable from the Presbyterians in doctrine, while their views on church government were so closely related as to make the possibility of compromise not remote. It was advocacy of the principle of religious toleration which set the Independents apart and since this principle gained for them the support of the sects, Independency was inevitably to be forced to the left by the radicalism of the diverse groups fused under its leadership. The Assembly was shocked to realize that an indigestible kernel of opposition had developed in an amazingly short while in the very body of the faithful. Even the intransigent Baylie wrote in December that every effort was being made to conciliate the dissenting opinions of the Independents. The Presbyterian leadership was confident that this dissent would shortly be overwhelmed, but was prepared out of politic considerations to reason with it "till it please God to advance our armie, which we expect will much assist our arguments."[1] Baylie was amazed by the stubborn resistance of the Independents, who feared "no less than banishment from their native country if presbyteries were erected" and who were persuading England that the Genevan Model was "a strange monster."[2] The Scots were never able to understand that Presbyterianism had few roots and but negligible lay following in England.

The decision to conciliate the opposition until "our army should be advanced" resulted in a declaration of the Assembly, voted on December 23, 1643, that it would "concur to preserve whatever should appear to be the rights of particular congregations, according to the Word; and to bear with such whose consciences cannot in all things conform to the public rule, as far as the Word of God would have them borne withal."[3] But the leaders of Independency had by this time taken the measure of Presbyterian resolution and intolerance. A few days later the five dissenting divines published the *Apologeticall Narration*, which was to provide the as yet amorphous opposition with the elements of a platform and which was to provoke the most acrimonious and perhaps the most important religious controversy that England had ever experienced.[1] The Puritan majority rejoined with a resolution disbarring officials in the courts who refused to take the Covenant,[2] and a few days later passed a preposterous order requiring every man in England above the age of eighteen to take the Covenant.[3] Baylie, writing shortly afterwards, declared that the principle of toleration championed by the Independent leaders drove a destructive wedge between the two parties. The Presbyterian party was prepared to seek an accommodation with the dissenting brethren, but "for that toleration they aime at we cannot consent."[4]

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[1] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 111.

[2] *Ibid.*, II, 117.

[3] Gardiner, *Civil War*, I, 268, quoting *Certain considerations to dissuade men from further gathering of churches.*

The irreconcilable nature of the divisions between the Presbyterians and the Independents was by this time fully apparent to the royalists. The moderates in Charles's camp sought to exploit the fertile possibility of forming an alliance with the dissenting elements of the opposition which would constitute a broad centrist basis for healing the wounds of Church and State. There was far more to commend the plan than has commonly been supposed. As early as March 1643, a group of moderate Anglican bishops meeting at Oxford had proposed to reorganize the Church along the lines of the Elizabethan settlement. The Laudian innovations were to be swept away and the Elizabethan definition of the Church was to be reaffirmed.[5] As the Independents gained strength, the moderate royalists broadened this compromise scheme to include the toleration of this sectarian group under a limited episcopal constitution. The royalists realized that the principal preoccupation of the dissenters was with toleration and "that they should never find the least satisfaction in their scruples and their principles in church government, from those who pretended to erect the kingdom of Jesus Christ."[1] Obscure negotiations were begun with the Independents, "among whom doe some few and very inconsiderable Anabaptists and other fantastick sectarys myx themselvs."[2] Both the moderate Anglicans and the Independents would, it was argued, prefer to live under an episcopal government rather than be fastened in the vise of Presbyterianism. The National Church might, by salutary reforms, be made a satisfactory frame for the religious life of England, broadening itself to include all reasonable and moderate men. The older bishops, infected as they were with Anglo-Catholicism, should be deprived and supplanted by able and pious men. The Laudian innovations should be destroyed, the just demands of those who had suffered under the recent tyranny should be granted, and a truly Protestant Church should be established.[3]

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[1] *Vide post*, 368–371, for a discussion of the important influence of this document in the development of the theory of toleration.

[2] *S. P. Dom., Charles I*, D, 26 (January 30, 1644).

[3] *L.J.*, VI, 411; *S.P. Dom., Charles I*, D, 44 (February 5, 1644). By this date all but four of the members still attending the House of Commons had taken the Covenant. The dissenting members were now expelled (*A continuation of certaine speciall and remarkable passages*, February 6, 1644; *et cf. Mercurius Civicus*, §37). *The Scotish Dove*, in commenting upon the parliamentary order, said, "There is an ordinance . . . to impose the Covenant . . . upon all men, with a penalty to them that refuse, not death, which is warranted by the example of *Asa* 2, *Chron.*, 15, 13, but confiscation of estates, which I hope will be the least penalty; for it is the least that we have any example of in Scripture." (February 5, 1644.)

[4] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 140.

[5] *V.P.*, March 27, 1643, xxvi, 258.

These negotiations were at best obscure and hopeless, occurring as they did in the poisoned atmosphere of war. Gardiner felt sure that the government at Westminster was following every stage of the discussion,[4] while Clarendon complained that the king saw in them only an opportunity to divide his enemies in order to gain a military advantage.[5] It was again unhappily demonstrated that the counsels of moderate men are impotent when the solution of spiritual and intellectual problems is sought in violence and war.

2. THE PRESBYTERIAN RELIGIOUS PROGRAMME; CLARIFICATION OF THE ISSUES BETWEEN THE PRESBYTERIANS AND THE OPPOSITION, JANUARY 1644–JANUARY 1645

The militant Puritans enjoyed their greatest prestige and power during 1644. Opposition against their plan of church government had not yet crystallized and Parliament was only beginning to exhibit the Erastian temper which was shortly to shatter the Puritan ideal. The Puritan majority worked in close and happy harmony with the Assembly in laying stone by stone the edifice of Church and discipline. In April 1644, Parliament passed an ordinance securing the pious observance of the sabbath. It was ordered that "none shall sell any wares or fruits, nor work, nor travel, nor use or be present at any exercises, games, or pastimes, on that day. That all May-poles (an heathenish vanity, generally abused to superstition and wickedness) be taken down."[1] Somewhat later in the year a general ordinance was passed requiring the destruction of all images and organs and prohibiting the use of copes and superstitious vestments.[2] In co-operation with the Assembly the House of Commons had likewise begun the consideration of the problem of repressing the strange and multiplying sects which had spread so rapidly since the collapse of the Establishment. Baylie indicates that the godly were disturbed especially by the Antinomians, the Anabaptists, and those who preach "a libertie for all religions."[3] These fears seemed confirmed when in November a sectary named Web was haled before the House of Lords under charges of preaching that the soul is not immortal and similar doctrines "as are not fit to be published." The sectary was committed to custody and to the more expert ministrations of the Assembly of Divines.[4]

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[1] Clarendon, *History*, IX, 167.

[2] *A secret negociation with Charles I*, 4.

[3] *Ibid.*, 5–10.

[4] Gardiner, *Civil War*, I, 266.

[5] Clarendon, *History*, IX, 167.

There were, indeed, symptoms of disaffection most alarming to the godly. The sects were spawning with amazing rapidity, the agencies of the government were wholly unable to curb the freedom of discussion which accounted for a literary outpouring such as England had never witnessed before, and the Independents were organizing the diffuse points of resistance to the Presbyterian will into a stalwart and resolute party basing itself upon the dread principle of religious toleration. Moreover, the infection had spread to high quarters both in Parliament and in the army. It was ominous that Cromwell, already marked as the military genius of the parliamentary forces, had delayed taking the Covenant until February 1644. He consistently declined to interest himself in the orthodoxy of either his officers or his men, and maintained a steady opposition to any plan of church government which would sacrifice the resolved and pious conscience to the uniformity demanded by orthodoxy.[1] There is a note of apprehension in the jeers of Manchester's officers at his "godly precious men" who had "filled dungcarts before they were captains" and who had created another "Amsterdam of enthusiasm" in the Isle of Ely.

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[1] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, V, 749 (April 6, 1644).

[2] *Ibid.*, V, 751.

[3] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 230 (September 16, 1644).

[4] *Perfect Passages of each dayes Proceedings*, November 20, 1644. These discussions were to fructify in the blasphemy ordinance of 1648, *vide post* 90–93, 111–115.

Even more alarming was the opposition to Presbyterianism which some of the most brilliant and dangerous men on the floor of the Commons were consistently displaying. This resistance first assumed serious proportions in September 1644. The Puritan clergy of the capital, alarmed at the freedom of preaching in the city, had petitioned Parliament to renew the bonds of discipline and not to "leave private persons or particular congregations to take up what form of service they please." "Erronious opinions, ruinating schisms and damnable heresies" were spreading rapidly while the orthodox clergy were neglected and unprotected.[2] The petition was received by the House of Commons with "great acceptation" and debate was begun on a form of ordination designed to regularize and limit preaching. The bill was demolished by the searching logic of Selden who declared it forged anew the bonds of an ecclesiastical tyranny, while D'Ewes complained that it would establish a repressive system quite as dangerous as that administered by the bishops. Whitelocke and Saint John followed to denounce with as stern invective the repressive structure which the Presbyterians appeared to be fabricating.

The able defensive tactics of the Erastian opposition were suddenly changed to a brilliant offensive when Saint John, perhaps prompted by Cromwell,[3] moved that the parliamentary committee appointed to treat with the Scots and the Assembly be instructed to "take into consideration the differences in opinion of the members of the Assembly in point of church government; and to endeavour a union if it be possible; and, in case that cannot be done, to endeavour the finding out some ways how far tender consciences, who cannot in all things submit to the common rule which shall be established, may be borne with, according to the Word, and as may stand with the public peace. . . ."[1] This motion was apparently wholly unexpected by the Presbyterian leaders,[2] and was passed by the House without a division before the gravity of the principle which it admitted was fully realized. Three days later Baylie wrote that the Assembly had been uninformed of the intention to introduce the bill. The dour Scot complained that the Independents had by diabolical cleverness secured a virtual toleration before the Presbyterians had got anything. He now felt sure that "the great shott of Cromwell and Vane is to have a libertie for all religions, without any exceptions."[3] Indeed, Vane "twyce at our table prolixlie, earnestlie, and passionatelie had reasoned for a full libertie of conscience to all religions. . . ."[4] The Independents in Parliament and in the Assembly, Baylie wrote, had resolved to secure complete congregational autonomy, so that a congregation "falling in all the heresies and crymes of the world, neither the whole nor any member of it can be censured by any synod or presbyterie in the earth."[5]

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[1] Gardiner, *Civil War*, I, 310.
[2] *Mercurius Civicus*, September 18, 1644.
[3] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 226.

But the parliamentary effort to secure accommodation was fruitless. Both the Presbyterians and the Independents were wholly inflexible.[6] The committee, at its first meeting on September 20th, named a sub-committee from the Assembly,[7] to consider and harmonize the differences existing in that body on church government. The smaller committee gave serious attention to a plan whereby church government should be administered by county boards composed of local ministers and lay governors, to be named by Parliament, but it was speedily discovered that the members were quite unable to agree upon the details of the proposal. Baylie felt, with some justice, that the Independents and Erastians were seeking to circumvent

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[1] *C.J.*, III, 626 (September 13, 1644).

[2] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 226.

[3] *Ibid.*, II, 230. [4] *Ibid.*, II, 235. [5] *Ibid.*, II, 236.

[6] Lingard, John, *The History of England, etc.* (L., 1849), VIII, 149.

[7] Vines, Marshall, Herle, Temple, Goodwin, and Nye composed the committee.

Presbyterianism even before its establishment.[1] But with the fall of Newcastle in the following month the temper of the Scots and the Presbyterians became completely uncompromising, and Parliament, again bowing to the imperative demands of political unity, ordered the Committee on Accommodation to suspend its deliberations. The effort to arrive at a comprehensive establishment was accordingly abandoned and Parliament somewhat wearily instructed the Assembly to proceed with the settlement of church government and the framing of a Directory of Worship to replace the Book of Common Prayer.[2]

The Presbyterian majority, having successfully thwarted the adroit strategy of the proponents of religious freedom, determined to press its advantage to a decisive conclusion. A series of resolutions were driven through the Assembly and Parliament which fashioned timber by timber the fabric of a Presbyterian establishment. On November 11, 1644, the Assembly recommended Presbyterianism to Parliament as the only fit and orderly government for the Church of England.[3] A week later the House of Commons, "after a long time of consultation," passed the measure which had been lost scarcely two months earlier. By this legislation freedom of preaching was restricted to those who had been properly ordained,[4] and this was of course understood to mean as the Presbyterians should define ordination. The Independent members of the Assembly had protested bitterly against the tyranny which might be imposed as a result of this ordinance, but scant regard was paid to their position. Nye had then risen to denounce Presbyterianism as a menace to religious freedom and as a positive danger to the civil state, only to be cried down by the outraged majority.[5]

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[1] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 235–237. When the sub-committee came back to report to the parliamentary committee, Vane and Saye were able to muster ten votes to the Presbyterian nine. (Shaw, W. A., *A History of the English Church during the Civil Wars and under the Commonwealth*, 1640–1660 (L., 1900), II, 39–40.)

[2] *C.J.*, III, 675; *L.J.*, VII, 31; *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly* (ed. by A. Mitchell and J. Struthers) (Edinburgh and London, 1874), Session 325.

[3] *L.J.*, VII, 61–62.

[4] *C.J.*, III, 697; *The Diary, or exact Journall*, November 15, 1644; *et vide The Parliament Scout*, November 15, 1644.

[5] Hetherington, W. M., *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (N.Y., 1843), 174–175.

The handful of Independents in the Assembly maintained a steady barrage of protest on the floor which was capably linked to an extraordinarily effective literary campaign by men outside the body. The apparent resolution of the Presbyterians to extirpate dissent was forcing the Independents farther to the left in search of sectarian allies and to an unqualified avowal of the principle of limited toleration.[1]

In the autumn of 1644 the Assembly proceeded to the delicate but all-important task of drawing up a Directory of Public Worship which would supplant the Prayer Book and end the confusion and licence which years of unregulated and unauthorized worship had created.[2] When the sturdy Genevan Directory was laid before Parliament it was accompanied by a weighty and eloquent dissent from the Independent leaders which gave eloquent testimony to the losing battle which they had waged on the floor of the Assembly.[3] Parliament sought to restrict the printing of the Independent memorial to three hundred copies for the exclusive use of its members.[4] The *Scotish Dove* soliloquized on the dissenting arguments: "If men will not be satisfied by reason, what hope is there to give them content. . . . He that will be ignorant, let him be ignorant still, and he that wil be wilful, will be wilful."[5] The House of Commons lent but scant attention to the Independent arguments,[6] while Baylie contemptuously dismissed the document. Gillespie, before returning to Scotland, addressed the Assembly in order to review its work and to estimate the position of Presbyterianism in England. He felt that with the abolition of episcopacy and the supplanting of the Prayer Book by the Directory the principal obstacles to a godly government and discipline had been removed. He spoke of the Independents with what they must have regarded as contemptuous forbearance. "I wish they prove to be as unwilling to divide from us, as we have been unwilling to divide from them. I wish that instead of toleration, there may be a mutual endeavour for a happy accommodation." The attention of the Assembly must be focused upon a unity of faith and worship and not upon the minor details which separate and divide that unity.[1] Gillespie here exhibited the psychology which seems to afflict every dominant religious group. The seamless robe of Christ was being rent by the obstinate concern of some men over inconsequential details of worship. The Presbyterians assumed that their system was infallible and divinely ordained. They were not fitted because of the rigidity of their intellectual position to understand that this contention might be denied by men quite as pious, quite as resolute, and quite as learned as they.

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[1] Clark, *English Nonconformity*, I, 334.

[2] *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Session 345.

[3] *The Weekly Account*, December 23, 1644; *The Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, December 23, 1644.

[4] *The True Informer*, §59.

[5] *Ibid.*, §62.

[6] The "House doth leave it to the Assembly, to bring in, at their own time, the reasons delivered in by the dissenting brethren, touching church government, together with the solutions; not doubting but they will use all convenient speed and diligence in the bringing of them in." (*C.J.*, III, 699.)

On the day following Gillespie's speech, Parliament voted to abolish the Book of Common Prayer and to establish the Directory which the Assembly was sending in section by section.[2] This vote brought Parliament face to face with the problem of securing the enforcement of a system of uniformity, a question which, to the undoing of the Presbyterians, it could never be brought to meet squarely. The division just taken by Parliament expressed a pious and formal intention without the slightest legal consequence unless it were buttressed by enabling legislation. The liberals in the Commons began immediately an oblique attack upon the bill by proposing the accommodation of Independency by endowing particular congregations with autonomy in disciplinary and internal affairs, without, however, wholly dissevering them from the presbytery. This compromise proposal was rejected by the House without a division, but the majority did not dare implement the Directory by legislation which would impose it rigidly and finally upon the nation.[1]

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[1] *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Session 353.

[2] The ordinance required that the Directory be despatched to the constables of the various parishes, who were instructed, under pain of a fine of five shillings, to deliver them to the minister of their parish within a week. The minister was required to read the Directory before the sermon on the Sunday following. The use of the Book of Common Prayer was prohibited under pain of a fine of £1 for the first offence, £10 for the second, and imprisonment for one year for the third. A fine of £2 was to be imposed for each refusal to use the Directory, and a fine of not less than £5 nor more than £50 for bringing the Directory "into contempt and neglect, or to raise opposition against it . . . in the derogation or depraving of the said Book." (*An ordinance of . . . Parliament for the more effectuall putting in execution the directory for publique worship, etc.* (January, 1645), 4, *et cf. The Weekly Account*, xxxiv week, 1645.)

The triumph of Presbyterianism was apparently near to completion with the passage of the Act establishing the Directory for Public Worship. But the very triumph of the extreme Puritans only served to excite still further the fears of the sects that they were to be crushed by a new species of spiritual repression and to strengthen the determination of the Erastian party to check the rising bigotry of Presbyterianism and to destroy its ultimate aims. Sectarianism, and especially Independency, was spreading rapidly in the army, in Parliament, and throughout the land. So long as the sectaries had lacked political and economic power their demands had been ignored or overridden. But by the close of 1644 there is ample evidence to sustain the view that the problem of dissent had now to be faced squarely. Clarendon wrote that during these months the Independents were making amazing gains. They publicly denounced the Covenant and espoused the principle of toleration. Their clergy were the most popular in London and their leaders in the Assembly were men of great influence and moral stature.[2] Baxter wrote, with grudging admiration, that the Independents were successfully preventing the institution of a Presbyterian discipline while strengthening themselves for a final effort to destroy the system entirely.[3] Baylie, now thoroughly alarmed, admitted, in a letter to Buchanan, that Independency had become a "mighty faction," pressing for liberty of conscience and free church government. England, he said, was cursed with a spiritual anarchy which was breeding heresy and schism.[4]

The astute and detached Venetian envoy observed the English religious scene with an awed kind of perplexity. He realized as early as March 1644, that the Independent leaders were powerful men whose influence in the Assembly far exceeded their numerical strength. He estimated that they led a sect which already numbered 100,000 adherents and which was dedicated to the creation of a tolerant ecclesiastical system not dissimilar to the Dutch.[1] In October the diplomatist regarded the Independents as more numerous than the Presbyterians and expressed strong doubts that the latter would be able to impose their church fabric and discipline.[2] It was apparent that the bigotry and intolerance of the Presbyterians was consolidating the sectaries in the Army, Parliament, and Assembly into a determined and effective opposition under Independent leadership.[3] The envoy ventured the amazingly shrewd guess that the Presbyterians would either find themselves isolated as a third party or be driven into the arms of the king.[4] The Independents were too strongly rooted to be extirpated and they were rapidly identifying themselves with the parliamentary cause. The Presbyterians, in their turn, were identified with the Scots, and the Scots were thoroughly detested by the English.[5] The quarrel about religion had become irreconcilable, and "this canker of division about church government keeps spreading in London."[6] Parliament had sought to confine preaching to authorized churches and to ordained ministers, but its commands were wholly ignored and it found itself powerless to check the spread of the contagion of sectarianism. The ambassador regarded the passage of the act setting up the Directory as a desperate effort to attain some order and stability by the imposition of a rigidly Presbyterian system. But in his judgment the effort was doomed to failure since the people had too long enjoyed religious liberty "by which everyone claims to form a religion to please himself, with most extraordinary names and opinions."[7]

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[1] During these debates the Assembly was enmeshed in controversy over the excommunication clause of the Directory (*Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Session 371). Nye and Goodwin taunted the Presbyterians because of their inability to define the sins worthy of excommunication, and accused them of seeking to usurp a power expressly reserved by Christ.

[2] Clarendon, *History*, VIII, 186.

[3] Baxter, Richard, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (L., 1696), I, 73.

[4] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 179, 180.

English Presbyterianism was, even at its inception, harassed by the dread spectre of a rising sectarianism which denied categorically its assumption of an infallible Church imposing a uniform worship and discipline upon the nation. This opposition served to make Puritanism frantic in its haste to achieve the Kingdom of God on earth and heightened its intolerance by placing it on the defensive. It was confronted, as well, by the Herculean task of reorganizing and purifying the intimate parish life of England, and of examining the credentials and private qualifications of some thousands of parish priests who showed a tenacious disposition to remain comfortably in the enjoyment of their livings. Puritanism had for many years made specific and harsh charges against the ministry and the liturgy of the Church of England. It now found, after it had destroyed the administrative machinery of the Church, that the task of cleansing the Church was not easy of accomplishment. None the less, the parliamentary committee on "scandalous ministers," appointed for the examination of the clergy, began its work with grim Calvinistic determination.

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[1] *V.P.*, March 11, 1644, xxvii, 78–79.

[2] *Ibid.*, October 28, 1644, xxvii, 147, 150.

[3] *Ibid.*, November 25, 1644, xxvii, 155.

[4] *Ibid.*, November 25, 1644, xxvii, 155.

[5] *Ibid.*, December 4, 1644, xxvii, 157.

[6] *Ibid.*, December 9, 1644, xxvii, 159.

[7] *Ibid.*, January 20, 1645, xxvii, 173.

Nothing was done in haste. Only a beginning in this work of reformation was made during the eight years of Puritan dominance, and there is evidence to indicate that the ejected Anglican clergy were given a thorough, if biased, examination. The Anglican Fuller admits that the committee found some of the clergy guilty of "offences . . . so foul, it is a shame to report them, crying to justice for punishment."[1] A contemporary work examined with lurid details the charges brought against a hundred ejected clergy in twelve southern counties.[2] Of this number fifty-two were ejected on charges of drunkenness and profanity, thirty-seven were charged with non-residence or gross neglect of their duties, twenty-four with serious breaches of morality, and seventeen with unqualified support of the king. With due allowance for the duplication of charges against several of the clergy, it would appear that at least one half were held to be guilty of offences demanding serious disciplinary measures. The whole question is so involved in controversy, however, that no final judgment can be given. Certainly the numerous group ejected for support of the king and for non-residence, which in most cases meant absence with the king, are wholly worthy of the commiseration which the Anglican apologists

[1] Fuller, *Church History*, VI, 268.

[2] White, John, *The first century of scandalous, malignant priests, etc.* (L., 1643).

have bestowed upon the entire body of the ejected clergy. The subsequent history of most of these clergymen cannot be traced. Heylyn estimated that one hundred and fifteen of the London clergy were ejected from their livings during the period (1641–1647) when the Presbyterians were in power. Of this number, twenty were imprisoned at one time or another and twenty-five fled.[1] We would assume that the remainder by conducting themselves quietly were able to live without serious molestation, as, indeed, did most of the clergy during this troubled period.[2]

The steady erosion of the fabric of the Anglican Establishment under the pressure of a militant and triumphant Puritanism was having its inevitable effect. We have noticed that there had always been a moderate Anglican party quite prepared to enlarge the basis of the comprehensive definition of the Church of England in order to include larger areas of Protestantism. This party now found itself powerfully placed in royalist counsels, gaining the uncertain support of the king for political purposes, and enjoying the tacit approval of the more conservative Anglicans who were now thoroughly concerned about their own preservation.

In the ill-fated negotiations between the king and the parliamentary commissioners at Uxbridge in early 1645, Hyde sought to develop a religious formula which would meet the demands of the Independents and gain the support of moderate and chastened Anglicanism. The royalist clergy at Oxford were consulted on February 10, 1645, concerning the limits of the concessions that might be made, and returned a memorandum which represents the maximum comprehensive proposals of Anglicanism during the period of the Civil War.[3] Both Presbyterianism and Independency might be accorded sectarian status by the relaxation of the penal laws against them. The episcopal power should be modified, and should be administered with the advice of presbyters and perhaps with the assistance of "other grave ministers" in the dioceses. Steps should be taken to secure a preaching clergy and pluralities should be abolished immediately.[1] The Book of Common Prayer should be retained, but salutary modifications might well be accepted. Complete freedom of conscience should be permitted in ritual and liturgy, though as much uniformity of worship as the individual conscience would permit should be preserved. Unfortunately, this Anglican proposal was regarded by the Presbyterians as an impious fraud[2] and by the Independents as a trap.[3] The Presbyterians were now intent upon the establishment of a godly Church which could permit neither rival nor compromise, and were by no means content to accept the sectarian status suggested by the Oxford memorandum. The Independents hated prelacy quite as much as did their more sternly Calvinistic brethren and, with good cause, had come to disbelieve completely in the sincerity and reliability of the king. The Uxbridge negotiations consequently collapsed and the religious struggle was resumed, now without any possibility of compromise.

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[1] Heylyn, Peter, *Aerius redivivus: or the history of the Presbyterians, etc.* (L., 1670, *1672*), 346 (mispaged for 446)–449.

[2] *Vide post*, 194–202, for a fuller discussion of the treatment of the Anglican clergy in the revolutionary period.

[3] We have followed Gardiner's account of these negotiations. See his admirable article in the *E.H.R.*, II, 340–342.

C. PRESBYTERIAN DOMINANCE AND THE MATURING OF THE MODERATE OPPOSITION, 1645–1647

1. FUSION OF INDEPENDENT-ERASTIAN OPPOSITION; OBSTRUCTIONIST TACTICS, JANUARY 1645–NOVEMBER 1645

Sectarian opposition to Presbyterian inflexibility was hardening and becoming more confident in both the Assembly and in Parliament during these months. In March, Nye expressed such impassioned objections to the government which the Assembly was framing that his party was asked by the harassed majority to bring in "a platform of government concerning particular congregations."[4] The Independents were thereby faced with the difficult task of making positive proposals on a most complicated subject and were subjected to the danger of alienating their sectarian allies. Moreover the Assembly had gained a respite from the guerrilla tactics of the Dissenting Brethren during which it could proceed with its appointed task.

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[1] *E.H.R.*, II, 341; Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, V, 872–873.

[2] *Perfect Passages*, February 17, 1645; *et cf. Mercurius Civicus*, §91.

[3] Gardiner, *Civil War*, II, 126.

[4] *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Session 404.

But in the field and in Parliament the star of Independency was rising rapidly and the heroic struggle of the handful of leaders in the Assembly was to receive solid and powerful support from new sources during the summer of 1645. The New Model had won a brilliant victory at Naseby in June and almost immediately the inscrutable Cromwell began to exert an overweening influence upon the progress of the religious dispute. The alarmed Baylie wrote, shortly after Naseby, "what retardment we may have from this great victorie, obtained most by the Independent partie . . . we doe not know; only we expect a very great assault, how soone we know not, for a tolleration to we wot not what."[1]

The "great assault" which Baylie feared was not long delayed. Within a few weeks after Naseby the Presbyterians had occasion to denounce the rapidly expanding influence of the sectaries, at the very moment when Vane was endeavouring to fill the vacancies in Parliament with members favourable to the cause of toleration.[2] Cromwell had become the idol of the sectaries and was openly assisting Vane and his allies in the House. "The Vanists in the House, and Cromwell in the army, joined together, out-witted and over-reacht the rest, and carried on the interest of the sectaries in special, while they drew the religious party along as for the interest of godliness in the general."[3] Cromwell had openly espoused the principle of religious toleration and was rapidly drawing the Independents and Baptists under his masterful influence.[4] The general's army was a hotbed of zealous sectarianism, and the vigour and competence of his leadership drew men like a magnet. The army, Baxter declared, was quite as concerned with the religious struggle as with the conduct of the war, and it appeared ominous to the conservative Presbyterian that "their most frequent and vehement disputes were for liberty of conscience," by which they meant that "the civil magistrate had nothing to do to determine of any thing in matters of religion, by constraint or restraint, but every man might not only hold, but preach and do in matters of religion what he pleased."[1] Sectaries were preferred for commissions,[2] and the general's army was united in a warm enthusiasm for the principle of religious freedom.[3] The civil war had become for these men a struggle for religious liberty, and the politicians at Westminster, whether in Parliament or in the Assembly, had shortly to feel the weight of their resolution.

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[1] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 291.

[2] Green, J. R., *History of the English People* (N.Y., n.d.), IV, 383.

[3] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 47.

[4] *Ibid.*, I, 48.

In a letter to the speaker of the House, reporting on his operation around Bristol in the late summer of 1645, Cromwell expressed himself forcibly and clearly on the question of toleration. He reminded the Commons that "honest men served you faithfully in this action, Sir, they are trusty, I beseech you in the name of God not to discourage them. I wish this action may beget thank fullnesse, and humility in all that are concerned in it, he that ventures his life for the liberty of his country I wish he trust God for the liberty of his conscience, and you for the liberty he fights for. . . ."[4] He declared that no real difference separated the Presbyterians and Independents, since "all that believe, have the real unity, which is the most glorious, because inward and spiritual, in the body, and to the Head."[5] This strangely stark and powerful sentiment alarmed and depressed a House of Commons torn between conflicting principles. Its frank defence of religious liberty on the broad contention that all believing Christians possessed the means and substance of grace appeared to the Presbyterian members dangerous and incendiary in the extreme. The House accordingly ordered the despatch printed, but with the omission of the offending paragraph.[1] But the principle for which Cromwell stood could not be so easily rejected. The general, as well as an ever-enlarging body of public opinion, was determined that Parliament must quickly and finally bring to an end the effort of a religious minority to force England into the coercive mould of a rigid system of uniformity.

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[1] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 53.

[2] Cromwell had, as early as 1643, displayed the largeness of his views on this question. A complaint had been registered against an officer holding Anabaptist opinions. Cromwell, in a famous letter to Crawford (March 10, 1643), took the position that the religious views of a man had no conceivable relation to his competency or loyalty to the state: "Sir, the state, in choosing men to serve them, takes no notice of their opinions, if they be willing to serve them, that satisfies. I advised you formerly to bear with men of different minds from yourself; if you had done it when I advised you to it, I think you would not have had so many stumbling blocks in your way. . . . Take heed of being sharp, or too easily sharpened by others, against those to whom you can object little but that they square not with you in every opinion concerning matters of religion." (Cromwell, Oliver, *Letters and Speeches*, (ed. by S. C. Lomas) (L., 1904), I, 171.)

[3] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 57.

[4] Cromwell, *Three letters* (L., 1645), [B.M. E 288 (27)].

[5] Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, I, 218. Carlyle here follows a variant text.

The Independent party in Parliament, now beginning to work in close harmony with the Erastians, grew steadily in numbers and in tactical ability. The great ideological weakness of the party was its indecision on the question of whether all sects should be tolerated or only those communions stemming from respectably Calvinistic roots. The Independent leaders were still wrestling with this perplexing and revolutionary issue, which Baylie shrewdly predicted would split the sect, and were consequently unable to assume positive leadership either in Parliament or in the Assembly. But the members in the Commons had learned much about strategy during the past year. One suspects that the ironical wisdom of Selden lay behind a very important shift in opposition tactics which occurred about the beginning of 1645. The question of toleration was not raised and no concerted attack was made upon Presbyterianism; but there was a deliberate attempt to modify and amend Presbyterianism out of all resemblance to the Scottish model. English antipathy to all things Scottish was outrageously exploited, clerical domination of the Church was denounced, the power of Parliament was extolled, and a steady demand for a thoroughly English settlement of religion was maintained.

These tactics were brilliantly employed in the debate on the long-disputed clause of the Directory dealing with exclusion from the sacraments. On May 9th the House accepted the recommendation of the Assembly that the power of exclusion should reside in the elders.[2] The Commons, however, declined to give to the Church an unrestricted and undefined power and proceeded to draw up a list of blasphemous sins and errors deemed serious enough to warrant exclusion.[1] There was hopeless disagreement on the matter and the Assembly instinctively realized that the whole question had been taken out of its hands and that the lay mind was rapidly coming to regard it as insoluble. The divines accordingly petitioned Parliament, pointing out that to restrain or define the power of the Church in so important a particular was to destroy the efficacy of the discipline which the Assembly was endeavouring to rear.[2] They made the rather pointed observation that it was Erastus who first questioned the power of the Church to excommunicate, and urged that Parliament was only assisting in the increase of boldness, profanity, and schism by its Erastian tactics.[3]

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[1] The deleted letter may be found in Cromwell, *Three letters*, [B.M. E 288 (26)].

[2] *L.J.*, VII, 363.

The parliamentary reply betrayed a new tone of distaste and weariness of clerical advice and interference which boded ill for the Presbyterian hopes. The Assembly was instructed to indicate what "notorious and scandalous sins" it proposed to add to the list being compiled by Parliament, and was required to make clearer its proposal for restoring excluded persons to the good offices of the Church.[4] The protest of the Assembly against the Erastian action of the House was coldly ignored. Grave damage to clerical prestige had been done in the heated debates which underlay the parliamentary reply. Selden and Whitelocke had attacked the clerical pretensions with devastating irony, well documented by carefully drawn historical precedents. Selden declared that for four millennia the power of the clergy to suspend men from religious exercises had been non-existent, having been introduced for no weightier reason than the necessity for excluding strangers from the passover. The Assembly, he charged, had sought to arrogate a strange and tyrannous power to the clergy, for "the question is not now for keeping away pagans in times of Christianity, but Protestants from Protestant worship."[5] Whitelocke followed to fasten upon the clergy the evil desire to raise up bishops in each congregation. He challenged the capacity of any human tribunal to judge the heart of man. The more sinful man is, the more is he in need of loving care and instruction, yet the clergy would drive such a man from the communion of the Church. They talk of "ignorant and scandalous" men, without realizing that these are highly relative terms. England must guard itself and arm itself against the appearance of great danger. "I have heard many complaints of the jurisdiction formerly exercised by the prelates, who were but a few; here will be by the passing of this now desired, a great multiplication of spiritual men in government."[1]

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[1] *L.J.*, VII, 362–363.

[2] *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Session 476.

[3] *L.J.*, VII, 524 (August 4, 1645); *Ibid.*, VII, 534; *The Moderate Intelligencer*, August 12, 1645.

[4] *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Session 485.

[5] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VI, 203.

The merciless logic of the great Erastian had its decisive effect. The discussion of the problem of exclusion was resumed and the Assembly was rewarded for its protest by a bill infinitely more distasteful than the earlier proposal to which it had taken exception.[2] The Lords proposed that all offences not specified in the parliamentary list must be referred to a standing parliamentary committee for decision.[3] This suggestion was expanded by the Commons in an amendment which lodged an appeal from excommunication in the *classis*, and that failing, to the parliamentary committee.[4]

The rebuff which Presbyterianism had experienced at the hands of Parliament betokened the spread of resistance to religious bigotry and may be regarded as the consequence of a singularly effective alliance between the Erastian lawyers in the Commons and the increasing number of sympathizers with Independency. Even more ominous was the discretion and suspicion exhibited by Parliament when it began to consider ways and means of implementing by leglislation the Presbyterian discipline to which it had already given formal approval.

The *Moderate Intelligencer* reported in late July that the Lords were favourable to the erection of a presbytery. The news-sheet rejoiced that the coercive power of the bishops had been destroyed and doubted whether Parliament would vest a similar power in any religious body. "Certainly it's as good a way to argue men into a way of religion, as to club them in, if not better, and seems to be rather the gospel way."[1] The Assembly was exerting steady pressure for the legal establishment of full-blown Presbyterianism, but Parliament was increasingly recalcitrant. It was finally resolved to regard London as a test area, and the city was accordingly divided into twelve *classes*. But it was an emasculated presbytery which Parliament had at last enjoined. The elders, in whom disciplinary power was vested, were to be indirectly nominated by a board of triers. "Thirty-six clergie men are chosen in the city, and within the line, out of the whole, to be part of that body; They are to take to them twice as many grave citizens to be joined in the same," and, it should be noticed, the "grave citizens" were to be nominees of Parliament.[2] This board was invested with the power of selecting the elders, thus preserving to Parliament ultimate control over church government in the capital.

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[1] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VI, 204–205.

[2] *Perfect Passages*, October 3, 1645.

[3] *L.J.*, VII, 610 (September 29, 1645).

[4] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VI, 210–212; *Moderate Intelligencer*, §32, §33.

The Presbyterians were thunderstruck by the sudden reversal of their fortunes in Parliament. The Independents were emboldened by the evidences of their increasing strength, and were declared to be "deviating more and more towards old and new errours, especiallie libertie of conscience."[3] The Erastian party in the House, led by Selden, Whitelocke, Saint John, Pierrepont, Birch, Crew, Widdrington, Hippisley, and Goodwin, had in the recent debates worked in the closest harmony with the Independents. Baylie blamed them, with some justice, for the reversal which the dominant group had sustained.[4] In October, the Scot dourly complained that the sectaries had suddenly become the "prevailing party," basing their platform on nothing less than universal liberty of conscience.[5] They exhibit a bitter hatred for the Scots and endeavour wherever possible to balk the plans of the godly. Their advocacy of toleration has now been expanded to the admission of all sects to liberty of conscience, and "what may come of this, we know

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Moderate Intelligencer, §22 (July 29, 1645).

[2] *Ibid.*, §23 (August 6, 1645).

[3] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 271.

[4] *Ibid.*, II, 318; Oldmixon, John, *The History of England, etc.* (L., 1730), II, 299.

[5] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 320.

not; only it were our heart's desire that our armie at Newark were recruited."[1]

Parliament was extremely sensitive, not only about the legitimacy but also about the intentions of its Erastian offspring. Shortly after the resolution setting up the London *classes* had been carried, a Presbyterian petition was handed in from the city obliquely criticizing the parliamentary creation by calling for the erection of "the discipline of Jesus Christ . . . which can be said of no particular government."[2] Parliament was deeply stirred by Presbyterian intransigence and used the occasion to prepare a lengthy memorandum of its position on the religious question which is worthy of extended treatment.[3]

The House reminded the Assembly that it had been convened by Parliament for the sole purpose of bringing in advice on such questions as should be submitted to it. The Assembly had persistently exceeded the bounds of its constitution, arrogantly demanding that Parliament "confirm whatever the Assembly shall propose to us, because haply they are pleased to give it the name of divine right." This clerical arrogance must be curbed lest it extend even farther. "We are not ignorant . . . that in all ages those that have got that spiritual weapon into their hands have fought their own quarrels with it . . . and what troubles and mischiefs ensued thereupon, all stories, especially those of this kingdom, are full." Parliament is vested with a national and a general responsibility and can legislate in the interests neither of a particular party nor of a particular age.[4]

The House of Commons then proceeded to a full examination of the differences which divided the clerical from the lay mind and to a thoughtful consideration of the problem of religious liberty with which it was now grappling. Friction had developed over the grave problem of discipline, and especially over excommunication, the extreme disciplinary power of the Christian Church. The Assembly demanded that this power should be vested exclusively in the clergy. The divines argued that "it is no arbitrary power which is according to the will of Christ and hath the Scripture for its rule, but if it be left arbitrary to them to judge what is the will of Christ and what the rule of Scriptures, the matter will not be much amended." It had become clear that the Presbyterian divines desired to bind the magistrate to their will and to impose another species of infallibility upon the realm. Parliament, the manifesto continued, cannot permit the Assembly to "raise up out of the dust again that exploded piece of popery, that churchmen must declare persons heretics, and then by an implicit faith the magistrate must hang and burn them."[1] This bigotry must be steadily restrained by the civil power. It is the task of Parliament to "leave as little arbitrary as may be." It is far better for Parliament to permit some laxity and even corruption in the Church than to impose rigorously a coercive establishment upon all men.

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[1] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 326, 327.

[2] *The True Informer*, September 23, 1645; *C.J.*, IV, 280.

[3] The memorandum was prepared by a committee appointed September 20, 1645, and was read for the first time on October 28th. It received its second reading on November 8th and was then apparently dropped. (*Vide C.J.*, IV, 280, 326, 336.) We have followed the text given in the *Historical Manuscripts Commission Reports*, *The Manuscripts of . . . the Duke of Portland, etc.* (L., 1891–1931), I, 296 ff. *Vide* also the comments in *The Diary, or exact Journall*, November 20, 1645.

[4] *Portland MSS.*, *H.M.C.*, I, 297.

The House of Commons expressed its resolution to build with the sound timbers of English experience. The reformation should be advanced in the parliamentary way. The work so nobly begun by Edward and Elizabeth should be extended "in causing the Reformation to move from the Parliament, and to carry it on in a parliamentary way; without prejudice to the freedom of the Parliament while it is in doing, and without impairing the just authority thereof when it is done, whereby to the magistrate will be preserved his right and to the people their power, whereunto we know no means so effectual as by leaving as little arbitrary as may be. . . ."[2]

The Assembly has constantly sought to persuade Parliament to sanction an establishment which the divines would infallibly impose. It has steadily complained that Parliament's failure to accede instantly to its demands has been responsible for the breeding of schism and heresy. But the issue now being resolved in England is not as infallibly clear as the limited vision of the Assembly would have the nation believe. Parliament, the apology would almost say, lies under a responsibility of balancing, considering, and weighing a religious situation far more complex than the narrow view of the clerical mind is prepared to admit. England had far better suffer a temporary ill than "a mischief settled forever." "Then might our enemies indeed scorn us as possessed with a spirit of giddiness, if having so lately . . . taken all civil power from ecclesiastical persons and pulled down the High Commission we should presently set up a Higher Commission or a power more arbitrary in every presbytery."[1] Parliament has no desire to encourage laxity, but is even less disposed to encourage rigour. "We know how apt men are to make that blasphemy and heresy which is contrary to what they hold, and to esteem their actions heinous whose persons they hate. We see how ready men are in our days to brand one another with the names of incendiaries, covenant-breakers, children of Belial, and fighters against the Kingdom of God, because they do not agree with them in every patricular, or consent presently to what they desire in things which in their own nature are indifferent or at least very disputable." Parliament must maintain a careful balance between those who would destroy all authority in the Church and those who would impose a persecuting tyranny upon all Christians. It cannot lend its ear to such as plead "for a toleration of all religious opinions," nor can it deny "the modest request and reasonable relief of tender consciences." It should be the aim of Parliament to preserve a moderate mean; it must dedicate itself to stretching out "the line of charity as far as the Word of God and the peace of the kingdom will bear."[2]

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[1] *Portland MSS.*, *H.M.C.*, I, 298.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 299.

This notable document indicates that an amazing revolution in public sentiment was sweeping England. The lay mind was beginning to detect in the rigid certainty and the intolerant resolution of the Westminster Divines precisely that clerical temper which had precipitated in England two periods of religious repression within a century. England had in the moment of revolutionary enthusiasm entrusted much authority and prestige in the Puritan clergy which it had come to regard as the persecuted remnant of historical Protestantism. The subsequent disillusionment had resulted in a reaction whose depth was only beginning to reveal itself. The opinion was arising that the clerical mind was by the very nature of its convictions intolerant, and the Erastians steadily argued—and events were sustaining their position—that it must be sharply restrained by the lay power. The parliamentary denunciation of clerical bigotry was couched in devastating terms; the restraints which it proposed were frankly and starkly Erastian. The several religious parties in England spoke glibly and certainly of an infallible religious truth; Parliament had revealed itself as half convinced that infallibility was a clerical phantom whose issue was a persecuting philosophy designed to support and maintain the pretensions of particular sects. Persecution had already been undertaken in England in the interests of too many infallibilities.

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[1] *Portland MSS.*, *H.M.C.*, I, 299.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 300.

Parliament was disposed to grasp for itself the settlement of the religious problem through the creation of an Establishment designed to include all orthodoxly Protestant men. It had come by painful stages to recall that Elizabeth had sought to give England a broad, tolerant, and flexible religious structure which would permit the free play of enquiry and conscience so long as the civil order was not contravened. It proposed, in its turn, to rear the ecclesiastical structure upon the solid foundations of an Establishment whose underlying philosophy history had now vindicated. The conception was essentially lay; the means of its creation were to be wholly lay. The will, the authority, and the catholic instinct of Parliament, representing as it did the body politic, must be firmly interposed between the dangerous extremes of spiritual anarchy and dogmatic rigidity.

2. THE PRINCIPLE OF ACCOMMODATION ENLARGED TO INCLUDE RELIGIOUS TOLERATION, NOVEMBER 1645–APRIL 1646

Parliament had expressed its determination to proceed carefully and slowly with the creation of a religious Establishment in England, and had indicated its resolution to find a *via media* between the conflicting sectarian programmes which were being urged upon the nation with such persistency and violence. This determination was reflected in a final attempt by Parliament to seek the reconciliation of the dominant party in the Assembly with the dissenting Independents. On October 13, 1645, the Independent leaders submitted a lengthy explanation for their failure to present a model of government in accordance with the earlier instructions of that body.[1] They declared that the temper of the Assembly had been so hostile that any report which they might render would serve only to heighten the existing ill will and consequently could not secure a fair and unbiased consideration.[2]

Acting in sympathy with the plight of the Independents, both Houses[3] ordered a revival of the work of the dormant committee on accommodation, instructing the members to find "some way how farre tender consciences, who cannot in all things submit to the common rule, which shall be established, may be borne with according to the Word, and as may stand with the publike peace."[4] The Independent members once more raised objections, and on November 24, 1645 were sharply ordered to "bring in unto this committee . . . wherein they desire to be born with in point of church-government, in all those things wherein they cannot submit to the common rule that is established."[5] Some days later the dissenting leaders replied that, though they were confident a firm agreement could be reached in matters of faith, their conscience required liberty from the Presbyterian discipline which the Assembly envisaged. They proposed that voluntary congregations might be permitted to exist within the framework of Presbyterianism, and that to these spiritual bodies autonomy and complete liberty should be extended.[6] The Independent position having been formally expressed, Parliament ordered the full committee to lend definitive consideration to the proposal.

The first meeting of the committee on December 15th made it clear that no agreement was possible. The Presbyterian majority took the view that Independency must submit itself to the discipline and doctrine of the Presbyterian establishment since separation would "grant liberty to destroy and pull down" the godly order which was in process of development.[1] They could concede no more than that persons having scruples of conscience might, with the consent of their minister, be exempted from the communion if they submitted to the discipline and the worship of the Church in all other respects.[2]

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[1] Goodwin, Thomas, *et al.*, *A copy of a remonstrance lately delivered in to the assembly* (L., 1645); *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Session 517.

[2] For the reply of the Assembly *vide Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Session 557.

[3] The Commons in late October, the Lords on November 6, 1645.

[4] *Papers given in . . . for accommodation* (L., 1648), 12; *L.J.*, VII, 679.

[5] *Papers given in . . . for accommodation*, 15.

[6] *Ibid.*, 16; Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 326–328.

This amazing proposal of voluntary excommunication stirred the Independents to a notable, if limited, defence of the principle of toleration. In *An answer to a paper brought into this Honorable Committee by a sub-committee of the Divines of the Assembly*, they again emphasized that they were one with the Calvinists in the fundamentals of faith. But they were much disturbed by the larger question which the majority appeared to ignore. "We meddle not with . . . impositions; or to set the bounds and limits of forbearance unto all tender consciences."[3] They charged that the orthodox majority had exceeded the power given to the Christian Church over the consciences of men. The Presbyterian philosophy is founded upon the erroneous conviction that it is unlawful to tolerate that which is contrary to self-appointed orthodoxy.[4] The presumption of this position bodes ill to Christian freedom and it cannot be sustained in reason or in Scripture. The Independents are accused of promoting schism, yet only as the Presbyterians arbitrarily define this unhappy word.[5] For they lay this charge indiscriminately against all who differ from them. Men who give testimony of their piety and peaceableness must be permitted liberty to worship as their conscience requires. "If such a practice meets with men, whose hearts are gracious, it will only irritate them to search further into the mind of Christ, and to walke before their brethren with more exactnesse, and to exercise love, meeknesse and forbearance towards their brethren who differ from them."[6]

The publication of this outspoken document aroused the wrath of a militant and now thoroughly alarmed Presbyterianism. The London clergy and the county council registered a violent protest against the impious defence of toleration.[7] The majority replied in a careful but inflexible memorandum which emphasized the fact that the proposal of the Independents, if logically extended, meant the complete undermining of conformity in England. They strive for nothing less than "a toleration to be provided before-hand, not only for persons already separated from us, but for as many as art and industry for all time to come, can be able to gain unto the same persuasion. . . ."[1] They propose to legalize error and to condone schism.[2] If the Independents do regard the Presbyterian communion as pure and orthodox they stand convicted of schism and obstinacy by forcing a separation; if they regard it as a false and impious Church they are wrong and heretical.[3] Thus the Presbyterians sought to impale the dissenters upon the horns of infallibility.

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[1] *Papers given in . . . for accommodation*, 20.
[2] *Ibid.*, 22.
[3] *Ibid.*, 26.
[4] *Ibid.*, 32.
[5] *Ibid.*, 35.
[6] *Ibid.*, 36–37; cf. Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 343.
[7] *L.J.*, VIII, 104–105; Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 341.

The wranglings in the committee were becoming acrid and involved.[4] Both sides felt themselves firmly entrenched in the truth of the Word of God and would accordingly relent not a particle from their theoretical position. Baylie complained that "blasphemous heresies are now spread here more than ever in any part of the world; yet they [the Independents] are not only silent, bot are patrons and pleaders for libertie almost to them all. We and they have spent many sheets of paper upon the tolleration of their separate churches."[5]

But the discussions were not yet exhausted. In early February the Independents handed in a more extended statement elucidating their position on the question of enforced conformity. They deplored the temper of their Presbyterian brethren who appeared to assume that they represented an exclusive truth already buttressed by the sanction of law. "We humbly desire that our consciences may be considered herein for forbearance, as our brethren desire that theirs may for power by a law."[6] All Christians should strive for uniformity, but it must be a spiritual unity achieved by spiritual agencies, "without tyranny and pressing mens consciences beyond the severall degrees of light, which God vouchsafes to severall churches more or lesse."[7] We have not yet attained the fulness of truth. Our grace and spiritual knowledge are enlarged constantly and we should not confine the limits of our faith by a rigid and unalterable definition. The only possible unity consists in men "walking together" in those fundamentals which they have already attained. Those matters about which men, equally pious and sober, disagree must be left free until God has made His will and truth clear to them all. To press a uniformity beyond the substance of righteous men's agreement is to usurp a power expressly prohibited to the Church, "and will prove a perfect tyranny; and will be so farre from being a means of love, which is aimed at, that it will lay the foundation of confusion and dissention."[1] Men differ in their religious statures quite as much as in their physical characteristics, and "as it were against nature, to stretch a low man to the same length with a taller, or to cut a tall man to the stature of one that is low for uniformities sake: so to bring both more grown, or more reformed churches to a middle stature for complyance with others" can be regarded as nothing less than an unrighteous tyranny.[2]

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[1] *Papers given in . . . for accommodation*, 47.

[2] *Ibid.*, 50.

[3] *Ibid.*, 75–76.

[4] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 349–350.

[5] *Ibid.*, II, 361.

[6] *Papers given in . . . for accommodation*, 88.

[7] *Ibid.*, 91.

The Independents had been impelled by the pressure of their sectarian allies, the increasing bigotry of the Assembly, and the logical extension of their own philosophy to enunciate a fruitful doctrine of religious toleration. An enlarging body of English thought had been persuaded by the hurried and confused course of historical development, during the momentous years since the Long Parliament had been convened, to the view that the State could be preserved and religious liberty maintained only by the acceptance of the semi-anarchistic tenets of sectarianism with regard to religious uniformity. A National Church should be erected as a pious hope and as a gesture to tradition, but the sects must be permitted freedom or toleration within its comprehensive limits. The majority of the committee, on the other hand, pointed unwaveringly to the fact that the Independent position amounted to a defence of almost unlimited religious freedom, while they asserted their own inflexible resolution to beat down heresy and maintain intact the godly fence of discipline.[3] Neither side could relent; so widely were they separated in point of view that accommodation was patently impossible.

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[1] *Papers given in . . . for accommodation*, 92.

[2] *Ibid.*, 92–93.

[3] *Ibid.*, 95–117; cf. Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 343.

The committee on accommodation adjourned its deliberations, as was shortly to be seen, permanently.

The revelation of the extent to which the acid of toleration had come to tincture the sectarian philosophy stirred the Presbyterians to frantic efforts to complete the forging of the chains of discipline before uniformity had disintegrated beyond all possibility of repair. Baylie hoped that his *Dissuasive* had appeared "in time to doe service" against the toleration which the Independents were advocating. "We hope God will assist us to remonstrate the wickedness of such an tolleration."[1] He found comfort in the fact that the city and the Assembly were firmly united in opposition to the destructive tenets of the sects. The Independents, he felt, had at last been forced to lay bare the full implications of the toleration which they proposed, and he could not believe that England was so reprobate as to remain unshocked. The ministers of the capital had resolved to petition Parliament against the iniquitous teaching of toleration,[2] and Presbyterianism was girding itself for decisive battle. The London petition, typical of a stream of orthodox protest now pouring in to Parliament,[3] denounced the existing state of affairs as intolerable. Discipline was completely relaxed, private preaching was unrestrained, new sects were spawning daily, and superstition, heresy, and laxity were visibly increasing. The petitioners demanded the immediate erection of the Presbyterian establishment as the only curb which could check the spiritual disintegration that had engulfed the realm.[4]

The majority in the House of Commons, which was still nominally Presbyterian, had hoped that some accommodation of Independency might be arranged, but were by no means prepared to accept the principle of toleration upon which sectarianism had taken its stand. The Presbyterians consequently possessed in the early months of 1646 a psychological and tactical advantage which they exploited to the full. The *Perfect Diurnall* reported in January that progress was being made in adjusting with the Assembly the long-disputed excommunication clause. There was evident, indeed, a disposition to give the ministers somewhat larger powers than had previously been contemplated, and "for the choosing of commissioners in each county to judge of scandalous sinners."[1] A few weeks later it was reported that the Commons were prepared to set up a modified Presbyterian system, though informed opinion had it that Parliament would find means for evading the momentous decision.[2]

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[1] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 328 (December 2, 1645).

[2] *Ibid.*, II, 343.

[3] *Vide post*, 297–313, for a consideration of the thought of these petitions.

[4] *L.J.*, VIII, 105 (January 16, 1646).

On March 5, 1646, the House of Commons finally succumbed to orthodox pressure, and passed an ordinance designed to set up a Presbyterian government as the Established Church of England.[3] The disputed issue regarding exclusion from the communion was resolved by vesting the power in the elders, with an appeal to the parliamentary committee in the event of offences not expressly provided for by act of Parliament.[4] Some days later the Lords approved the ordinance with minor amendments.[5]

The legal framework of the Genevan model had at last been achieved, but it was clear that the Presbyterians had won no more than a formal triumph. The enabling legislation remained undebated and unpassed, the structure of the Church was as yet non-existent save for the London model still in process of organization, and the question of tender consciences was admittedly yet to be solved.[6] One is tempted to say that the only thing lacking for the Presbyterian Church was Presbyterians. The enthusiasm of Parliament for the Presbyterian order fluctuated almost as if by a physical law with the political pressure which the Scots could bring to bear. An important outpost had been won by the Presbyterians, but the trenches of the opposition remained to be carried.

The House of Commons had demonstrated, however, that it was by no means prepared to admit the principle of toleration which the expanding body of sectarian opinion was urging with such remarkable success in the army and in the nation at large. Gradually, however, the complexion of the House was changing through the filling of the large number of vacancies created by withdrawals and death,[1] and younger and more radical men were taking these seats. As early as October 1645, a correspondent had written to Sir Henry Vane, Sr., that "the House fills daily with new members, most of the severer strain." A member had prayed that those taking their seats might be dominated by the spirit of Hampden, Pym, and Strode.[2] Before the close of 1646, 235 new members had been seated, including such important figures as Ireton, Ludlow, Hutchinson, Fleetwood, Blake, and Sidney.[3] These men were inclined either to support the political views of the army or to range themselves with the brilliant Erastian party in the House. A firm alliance was being forged between the Erastians and the Independents, and this combination was gradually gaining control of Parliament.[4] The Venetian envoy observed in the spring (1646) that Parliament had taken the religious problem into its own hands and the Scots were not to have their way.[5] The Independents grew stronger daily and were successfully identifying English Presbyterianism with the Scots, who, already unpopular with the Long Parliament, were shortly by their political duplicity to become anathema. Baylie, who witnessed these developments with extreme foreboding, observed that the Independent members, "being prime men, active and diligent," were "making it their great work to retard all till they be first secured of a toleration for their separate congregations."[6] He realized that classical Presbyterianism in England rested upon no more solid foundation than the requirements of political solidarity.

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[1] *Perfect Diurnall*, January 19, 1646, January 15, 1646.

[2] *Moderate Intelligencer*, February 20, 1646.

[3] *Ibid.*, March 12, 1646.

[4] *C.J.*, IV, 463–464; *Scotish Dove*, March 11, 1646.

[5] *L.J.*, VIII, 208–209 (March 13, March 14, 1646).

[6] *Vide* the interesting comments in this connection in the *Perfect Diurnall*, April 18, 1646.

From time to time the moderate and Erastian temper of the Commons flamed up despite the political necessity for preserving intact the alliance with the Scots. The Assembly had been requested to refrain from further dispute with the Independents in order not to "multiply books, and make the rent greater."[7] In commenting upon the dispute over infant baptism, Parliament had declared, according to the *Perfect Diurnall*, that "we hold it fit that men should be convinced by the Word of God with great gentleness and reason, and not beaten out of it by force and violence." Again, when the Assembly sought to revive the vexatious question of exclusion from the sacrament,[1] which had recently been settled by a compromise, the Commons exploded in wrath.[2] The redoubtable Fiennes was appointed chairman of a delegation instructed to inform the Assembly once more of its constitution and position.

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[1] Gardiner, *Civil War*, III, 77–78.

[2] *S.P. Dom., Charles I*, dxi, 13.

[3] Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, 204–205.

[4] Gardiner, *Civil War*, III, 78.

[5] *V.P.*, June 21, 1646, xxvii, 266–267.

[6] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 336 (January 15, 1646).

[7] *Moderate Intelligencer*, December 11, 1645.

Fiennes declared that Parliament was resolved to erect in due season a church government based upon the Presbyterian model. But the responsibility for this decision rests upon Parliament and not with the Assembly. The Assembly was called into existence by an act of Parliament and its functions, scope, and authority were limited and determined by Parliament. Its recommendations gain the weight of law only when Parliament so determines. It was not and is not the interest of Parliament to "consent to the granting of arbitrary and unlimited powers of jurisdiction to nearly 10,000 judicatures to be established in this kingdom" to the prejudice of the political and religious liberties of the realm. Nor can the Assembly rule finally on the question of liberty for dissenting consciences. Parliament has reserved to itself the responsibility for "tender consciences, which differ not in any fundamentals of religion," and will give them such liberty "as may stand with the Word of God, and the peace of the kingdom." Parliament has not been willing to depute ecclesiastical power to the Assembly or to any other authority since history has demonstrated that the people of God in England are best protected by the civil power. "The parliament," Fiennes concluded, "doth not pretend to an infallibility of judgment, and the parliament suppose that this Assembly will not do so neither." Parliament assumes that the supreme power of framing laws, lay and ecclesiastical, remains vested exclusively within its discretion.[3]

This rebuke, if it may be taken as reflecting the temper of the

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[1] *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Session 631.

[2] *C.J.*, IV, 518 (April 21, 1646).

[3] Following slightly variant texts: *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Session 631; *The Weekly Account*, April 16, 1646.

Commons, would indicate that England was very far indeed from the reception of the Presbyterian order which the Assembly had contemplated. The church system slowly elaborating itself in the House of Commons was thoroughly English: Presbyterian in doctrine, but shorn of its coercive and sovereign power by the relentless control of an Erastian legislature and broadened almost to the point of extinction in order to accommodate the restless spirits of men who could admit its discipline. When the Parliament spoke of Presbyterianism, it endowed it with a meaning strange indeed to the godly in the Assembly who were busying themselves, as if in a vacuum, with the creation of a perfect Church.

3. Scottish negotiations with the king and the decline of Presbyterian prestige, April 1646–June 1646

But the Erastian solution which appeared to be at hand in April 1646 was to be delayed and profoundly modified by the stern realities of politics. The king's military strength had well-nigh evaporated after his irreparable defeat at Naseby in June 1645. The pressure of negotiation and intrigue was now substituted for political strength by the Royalist party. Charles sought to divide his enemies by negotiation and to sap the strength of the parties constituting the parliamentary front by treating with them in turn.

During March 1646 he had approached the irreconcilable Independents through Vane. It was at that time indicated that the king was prepared to yield liberty of conscience to all parties and, if the Presbyterians proved intransigent, to assist the Independents in subduing them.[1] The Independents declined to rise to the bait, suspecting the king's honesty and having certain knowledge that he was already deeply involved in a treaty with the Scots. The Independents realized that they were now exposed to the gravest risks. Political expediency dictated the largest possible concessions to the Presbyterians in religion in order to prevent the total collapse of constitutional resistance. Parliament was therefore driven to consent to the

[1] *Clarendon State Papers*, §2137.

erection of a Presbyterian Church in England as the price of political solidarity, though it could not surrender "arbitrary and unlimited power and jurisdiction" to the clergy or ignore the just claims of those who, agreeing in the fundamentals of faith, could not submit without exception to the discipline and worship of the contemplated establishment.[1]

The Presbyterians, however, now enjoyed a supreme negotiating advantage which they sought fully to exploit. They undertook conversations with the king with that naïve confidence which determined piety can on occasion inspire. The king, after decent soul-searching on the question of episcopacy,[2] agreed to the establishment of the Presbyterian Church in England, and pledged himself to assist in the suppression of "all superstitious sects and Independents," provided legal toleration were permitted for Anglicanism.[3] This nebulous understanding was elaborated in the *Newcastle Propositions* (July 1646), in which the king was asked to agree that the "reformation of religion according to the Covenant, be settled by act of Parliament, in such manner as both Houses have agreed, or shall agree upon, after consultation had with the Assembly of Divines."[4] Charles returned to the *Propositions* a characteristically evasive reply.[5] His true feelings concerning Presbyterianism were expressed in a letter to his intimates wherein he declared that it was more erroneous and antimonarchical than Romanism, yet political considerations required that he should gain the support of the Scots if complete disaster were to be averted.[6] He informed the Scottish commissioners that he was in full agreement with them concerning the urgent necessity for weeding out the error and heresy so rampant in England. Nor was he hopelessly opposed to Presbyterianism, for "if it be so clear as you believe, that episcopacy is unlawful, I doubt not but God will so enlighten mine eyes, that I shall soon perceive it; and then I promise you to concur with you fully in matters of religion."[7] A close understanding between the crown and the Scots was necessary, he urged, in order to prevent the triumph of the doctrine of toleration with the consequent ruin of both episcopacy and Presbyterianism.

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[1] *C.J.*, IV, 513–514.

[2] *Clarendon State Papers*, §2225.

[3] Gardiner, *Civil War*, III, 112.

[4] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VI, 310.

[5] *Ibid.*, VI, 320–321.

[6] *Clarendon State Papers*, §2277 (August 12, 1646), §2263 (July 22, 1646).

[7] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VI, 328.

These tentative negotiations had already had the effect of paralysing the energy of the Long Parliament and of splitting the opposition hopelessly. The king resolved to exploit this advantage decisively. In late September he called upon the Bishop of London to advise him how far he might proceed in "the proposed temporary compliance, with a resolution to recover and maintain the episcopal doctrine and discipline."[1] The bishops of London and Salisbury returned the comforting opinion that his conscientious resolution eventually to restore the Church of England excused a temporary compliance with the demands of the Presbyterians. Concessions had of necessity to be made, though they should be regarded as stemming from necessity rather than from principle.[2]

On the fragile basis of this reasoning the king proposed to the Scots the temporary establishment of Presbyterianism with a complicated arrangement for effecting a permanent establishment after three years had elapsed.[3] The proposal was rejected out of hand by the Scottish commissioners, and the king, quickly changing his tack, sought to gain the support of the more moderate English Calvinists.[4] During the winter, sporadic conversations were carried on with the leading Presbyterian peers, who were now convinced that English public opinion could be trusted to declare for the permanent adoption of Presbyterianism after the salutary benefits of the trial period had been observed. But the Scots remained grimly adamant, and in May 1647 the king found himself obliged to accept the undertakings of the *Newcastle Propositions* in order to gain assistance.[5] This agreement[6] laid the basis for the Second Civil

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[1] *Clarendon State Papers*, §2323 (September 30, 1646).

[2] *Ibid.*, §2331 (October 14, 1646).

[3] Gardiner, *Civil War*, III, 166; *Clarendon State Papers*, §2332.

[4] Gardiner, *Civil War*, III, 174.

[5] *L.J.*, IX, 193.

[6] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VI, 487. The fissure between the moderate English Presbyterians and the inflexible Scottish group, which began to appear at this time, was to be of great and permanent significance. We have commented upon it at length in our discussion of Presbyterian thought. (*Vide post*, 271–273, 316 ff.) The immediate consequence of the development of the more moderate party was another fruitless attempt

War and irretrievably completed the rupture between the Independents and the Presbyterians. The hopeless search after accommodation was at an end; the issue was now squarely joined between the principle of toleration and the ancient ideal of the exclusive Church.

The negotiations with the king were to be fatal to Presbyterian prestige in England. They confirmed the suspicion of the majority of Englishmen that the system set forward by the Westminster Assembly had an alien complexion, and served to drive a steely wedge of dissension between the orthodox Scottish Presbyterians and the more moderate English group who were willing to make substantial concessions both to Parliament and to the Independents. These unfortunate negotiations had the further effect of strengthening the opposition of Parliament to unrestrained clerical power, and of vesting leadership, almost by default, in the Erastian-Independent bloc.

These developments were delayed during the summer of 1646 because of the desire of Parliament to placate the moderate Presbyterians and because Parliament was not yet prepared to enter the icy bath which the Independent thinkers had prepared for it. By midsummer it was apparent that the Presbyterian majority had lost control of Parliament in political matters, but the Commons were still inclined towards moderate Presbytery in the religious divisions of these weeks. In June the House of Commons ordered the election of elders for the London model to proceed, and before many months the city had received a nominal Presbyterian government.[1] Furthermore, the Assembly had been instructed to hasten with the completion of the Confession and the Catechism which were so grievously required for the combating of heresy and error.[2] Parliament was proceeding with the greatest caution both in politics and in religion. The Independents were exploring every possible means for getting the Scots across the Tweed, while carefully avoiding major disputes on the explosive question of religion.[3]

on the part of the parliamentary moderates to placate Presbyterian apprehensions in order to preserve some appearance of unity in a rapidly dissolving revolutionary coalition.

[1] *C.J.*, IV, 569.

[2] *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Session 677.

[3] Gardiner, *Civil War*, III, 139–140.

4. RADICAL SECTARIANISM WEAKENS THE MODERATE POSITION; THE BLASPHEMY BILL, JUNE 1646–MARCH 1647

This conservatism in religion was confined, however, to Parliament. The defection of the Scots resulted in a profoundly significant reaction in the religious life of England. Independency stood as the embodiment of the parliamentary cause and it appeared to offer the only certain protection to the spiritual aspirations which the years of excited discussion had provoked. Sectarianism spread with amazing rapidity during 1646–1647, emerging as the dominant spiritual and political force in England. The great Independent preachers were now being heard before Parliament where they sketched ably and persistently the "great design of toleration."[1] Sectarianism had triumphed in the army, where the vital chaplaincies had been abandoned to the enthusiasts by the orthodox clergymen, now comfortable, if immobilized, in the livings of the dispossessed Anglican clergy.[2] Independency made of toleration a lodestone which kept the ever-spreading fragments of sectarianism in a formidable cohesion under its leadership. Independent churches were springing up throughout England and important conversions were being made even in the ranks of the Presbyterians.[3] The Venetian ambassador observed with amazement that "the door remains open to countless sects and men live without knowing either what to believe at the moment or what should be their tenets for the future. . . ."[4] Men were petitioning the Commons to grasp spiritual power to itself and to grant complete liberty to all religions.[1] The army was resolved that liberty of conscience should be maintained and that men may not be told, "Sir, you shall be baptized, you shall take the Covenant, you shall be of our religion."[2] The "deeper portion of the English mind" appeared to desire the "forest-tree way," which would permit the free growth of religious timber. Already "we have Anabaptists, Brownists, sectaries, and schismatics springing up very rife. . . ." The Presbyterians, contemplating this jungle of luxuriant sectarian growth, cry, "apply the shears"; but the victorious army answers, "apply them gently; cut off nothing that is sound!"[3] The aloof Boyle, observing this amazing spread of sectarianism, wrote: "There are few days pass here, that may not justly be accused of the brewing or broaching of some new opinion. Nay, some are so studiously changeling in that particular, they esteem an opinion as a diurnal, after a day or two scarce worth the keeping. If any man have lost his religion, let him repair to London, and I'll warrant him, he shall find it: I had almost said too, and if any man has a religion, let him but come hither now, and he shall go near to lose it."[4]

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[1] The list of ministers invited to preach before Parliament affords an interesting and reasonably accurate index to the gradual liberalization in the point of view of the House of Commons. One hundred and thirty-four different preachers who addressed Parliament between 1641 and 1646 may be counted in the great Carlyle collection of Puritan sermons now preserved in the Harvard College Library. Until 1645 these preachers were, on the whole, drawn from the Assembly and represented the rigidly Presbyterian point of view. But after 1645 a definite liberalization is to be observed. Men like Dury, Sterry, Peters, Burroughs, Cradock, and Thomas Goodwin were frequently invited to preach in what had become the most important pulpit in the nation.

[2] Trevelyan, G. M., *England under the Stuarts* (N.Y., 1914), 280–281.

[3] Clark, *English Nonconformity*, I, 343–344.

[4] *V.P.*, June 21, 1646, xxvii, 266–267.

The Long Parliament now held its "supreme power in fee from the crusaders of the New Model."[5] The army was pervaded with a sectarian spirit dedicated to the defence and attainment of religious toleration for all men of persuasions stemming, however remotely, from Calvinism. The conservative religious policy of Parliament was maintained by the temper of men whose patience was becoming shorter and whose zeal was growing steadily greater.

Even the broadly conceived tolerance of the army, however, could not view with equanimity some of the radical sects which were spawning in the fertile soil of a disintegrating religious authority. In particular, pious opinion of all shades of orthodoxy was outraged by the emergence of English Socinianism, upon which all Christian communions looked with complete horror.[1] Parliament, now pursuing an extremely cautious course in religion, was particularly horrified since the appearance of Socinian opinions lent considerable credence to the Presbyterian argument that the immediate imposition of the classical discipline was necessary if England were to be preserved from spiritual anarchy.

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[1] *Moderate Intelligencer*, March 15, 1647; *The Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, March 19, 1647.

[2] *Moderate Intelligencer*, July 6, 1646.

[3] Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, I, 251.

[4] Boyle, Robert, *Works* (ed. by Thomas Birch) (L., 1744), I, 20–21.

[5] Trevelyan, *England under the Stuarts*, 275.

The wrath of Parliament was centred upon one Paul Best, who had imbibed Unitarian opinions while in Germany, and who was now preaching and writing in defence of modified Socinianism. As early as June 1645, the Assembly considered at some length the "blasphemous opinions" of Best, voting to lodge a complaint in the House of Commons against him. The divines urged the members to "use that authority that God hath put into their hands for the vindicating the honour of God and of Jesus Christ" in rigorously repressing the heresies dispersed in books "under the pretence of liberty of conscience."[2] The complaint against Best was most particularly defined. His errors were enumerated and the divines demanded that Parliament should exercise its authority "for executing of condign punishment upon an offender of so high a nature: that, in reference to the crime, he may be made exemplary; that all the world may know, how much you detest such prodigious blasphemies, and heresies of so fearful a nature."[3]

For rather more than six months the House delayed consideration of the delicate issues which the Assembly had thrust upon it. In January 1646, Best was finally arraigned before the House on the specific charges of "denying the Trinity of the Godhead, the deity of Christ, and Holy Ghost, and other unheard of blasphemies." A motion was carried requiring the introduction of an enabling ordinance empowering "the punishing of the said Paul Best with death."[4] The House of Commons, however, declined to commit itself to such summary action, and in February the ordinance was reported as "some wayes retarded."[5] The explosive case was gingerly delivered back to the Assembly, which was instructed to appoint a committee to seek the edification and the cleansing of the heretic. The Assembly quickly replaced the problem squarely in the lap of Parliament by reporting on March 31st that it was impossible to reason with the Socinian.[1] A few days later Best was brought before the bar of the House where he was formally accused of "several horrid blasphemies." On this occasion the heretic staggered the lay, if pious, intelligence of the Commons by a highly metaphysical defence of his views. He maintained that, while he acknowledged the trinity and had not spoken against it, he denied "the tri-personality of Athanasius," which he branded as popish.[2] The Commons had no inclination to be led into the morass of such subtleties and washed their hands of the case by naming a thoroughly Erastian committee headed by Fiennes and Vane to confer with Best, while inviting other members of the House who felt qualified or disposed to assist the committee. Best was remanded to prison, whence he continued to publish without restraint. He was released in 1647 after "above one hundred petitions printed and written to the House" had protested vigorously against his imprisonment.[3]

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[1] *Vide post*, 203–208, for a fuller discussion of the early development of Socinianism in England.

[2] *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Session 451.

[3] *C.J.*, IV, 170.

[4] *Perfect Diurnall*, January 27, 1646.

[5] *Ibid.*, February 16, 1646.

In the Best case the House of Commons had shown itself unwilling to proceed rigorously even with an heretic whose views outraged the piety of the members, of whatever religious persuasion. The existence of grievous error against the fundamentals of Calvinistic Christianity could not be ignored, however, particularly in the face of the persistent and impassioned demands of the Assembly. The Best incident had shown that Parliament regarded itself as lacking legislation effective for the punishment of serious error and blasphemy. The Long Parliament had, it is true, previously taken summary action against such offenders,[4] but had not on these occasions been disposed to press the punishment further than short imprisonment. In 1646 the Lords passed a hazy ordinance, aimed apparently against the more fanatical Anabaptists, requiring the justices to oust any person who should disturb a minister in the exercise of his public calling.[1] The revelations of the Best case had greatly strengthened the resolution of the orthodox divines to seek to purge the land of blasphemous error. Accordingly the Commons had in April 1646 set up a committee, instructed to prepare a bill for the suppression of heresies and blasphemies.[2] On September 2, 1646, Bacon and Tate, reporting for the committee, moved in the House of Commons the passage of an important ordinance for the suppression of heresy and blasphemy which was to occupy Parliament from time to time during a period of almost two years.

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[1] *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Session 613.

[2] *C.J.*, IV, 500; *Moderate Intelligencer*, April 4, 1646.

[3] Best, Paul, *Mysteries discovered, etc.* ([London ?], 1647), 1.

[4] Thus, in 1643/4, Robert Baldwin had been committed to the Gatehouse and one Kendall to Newgate for Anabaptist opinions. (*C.J.*, IV, 447; *L.J.*, VI, 470. For similar cases *vide C.J.*, IV, 206, 284; *L.J.*, VI, 70, VII, 494.)

The bill was read twice and was sent to the committee of the whole House, without a division, on the day of its presentation.[3] In its initial form the measure was vague and completely unenforceable, and the long debate was to be centred upon numerous amendments whereby the moderates sought to amend it into oblivion.[4] The bill undertook the difficult task of linking recusancy with extreme Protestant dissent, proposing to curb both with the same coercive machinery. Thus persons holding such diverse errors as free will, infant baptism, denial of the sacrament of baptism, and heretical opinions regarding the eucharist were to be punished by imprisonment until two bondsmen should give security for their subsequent doctrinal propriety.[5]

The Commons spent most of the day on September 16th in consideration of the measure.[6] The opposition took the unanswerable position that it was foolish and tyrannical to attempt to pass legislation punishing error until error had been defined through the promulgation of the doctrines of the Church of England. These members therefore proposed that further discussion should be delayed until the Assembly had brought in an acceptable confession of faith.[7] They pointed out that the very fundamentals of faith were as yet undetermined, and expressed the hope that the confession would "inlarge" but not

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[1] *An order of the Lords . . . for the punishing of Anabaptists and sectaries, etc.* (L., 1646). *Vide C.J.*, IV, 184, for an earlier bill.

[2] *C.J.*, IV, 526 (April 29, 1646).

[3] *Ibid.*, IV, 659 (September 2, 1646).

[4] *Ibid.*, IV, 688, 692, 707, 721.

[5] *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, September 10, 1646.

[6] *C.J.*, IV, 670.

[7] *Moderate Intelligencer*, September 16, 1646.

"exceede" the Apostles' Creed, taking care "that none may either be too rashly excluded or included."[1] The *Moderate Intelligencer*, which offered steady, if discreet, opposition to the proposed legislation, announced on September 23rd that the Presbyterian leadership in the House was bringing its full influence to bear in the interest of the early passage of the bill. The first clause, regarding persons who denied the existence of God or His omnipotence and omnipresence, was voted, though hopeless dispute had broken out concerning the precise wording of the clause dealing with trinitarian errors.[2] In its next issue the news-sheet reflected that the persecuting philosophy underlying the bill was open to serious question. The ruler enjoys power to order religion in so far as the peace of the state is concerned, but it does not follow that he can coerce religious opinion.[3] The bill is reminiscent of Queen Mary's days when men who could not be converted by reason were "clubd into a prison or fire." England can no longer be subjected to such spiritual tyranny. The Church must confine itself to the use of the spiritual weapons with which Christ has invested it.[4]

In November, after repeated hearings on the bill,[5] the clauses dealing with atheism were more carefully defined, and in that month the Commons resolved that whoever "shall expressly write, or preach, or publish anything against the attributes of God, and shall willingly persist therein . . . shall be tryed by the judges of the land, and bee punished with death."[6] It was argued that heretics mired in these errors deserved no mercy since there could be no expectation of their conversion. Such an heretic is a soul-murderer and "doth more mischief, than if he destroyed the lives of a whole Parliament, yea, of a whole nation."[7] It should be observed, however, that after two months of consideration Parliament had been able to agree upon nothing but the death penalty for atheism, an extremely rare phenomenon indeed in this most theistic century. Even Unitarianism, it was conceded, was not clearly included under the punitive provisions of the clause.[1] The Presbyterians were bitterly disappointed with the progress of the bill and were thoroughly alarmed by the obstructionist tactics of the Erastians and Independents. Their temper was displayed in a strongly worded petition from the city, handed in on December 19th, which demanded immediate legislation for the repression of heresy and error. Parliament thanked the "Covenant engaged" citizens for their interest in the godly task to which it had set its hand, and then deliberately delayed further action on the explosive measure for many months.[2]

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[1] *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, September 16, 1646.

[2] *Moderate Intelligencer*, September 23, 1646.

[3] *Ibid.*, §82, September 24–October 1, 1646.

[4] *Ibid.*, October 29, 1646.

[5] *C.J.*, IV, 707, 721, 726, 727, 729, 730, 739.

[6] *Moderate Intelligencer*, §90.

[7] *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, December 8, 1646.

During these troubled weeks the moderate leadership in the House of Commons had preserved a discreet silence on the question of toleration. It must have appeared to the uninformed contemporary observer as if Presbyterianism was gaining steadily in strength and prestige. When a petition was read in the Commons from "many thousands of the well-affected" of the county of Lancashire asking for a division of the county into nine *classes* and naming the minister for each presbytery with "others fit to be," the House promptly approved the establishment of the desired Presbyterian organization for the county. In compliance with the demand of the London clergy, the House of Lords had ordered Fairfax to require his officers and men to subscribe to the Covenant and to punish all sectaries in the ranks guilty of disturbing the public worship. In November 1646, the Independents, in response to irresistible pressure from the enthusiasts in their own ranks and amongst their allies, had somewhat timidly sought to secure freedom for unordained "gifted men" to preach, "there being in many places a great scarcity of preachers."[3] A bitter debate divided the Lower House when the measure was discussed there in December 1646. The Presbyterians prevailed once more and the efforts of the Independents were shifted immediately towards preventing the establishment of penalties for unauthorized preaching.[4] The Lords sought to balk this assault upon orthodoxy by sending down an ordinance forbidding all persons who had not been ordained in the Church of England or some other reformed Church to preach or expound the Scriptures in any church, chapel, or other place. After a desperate effort the Independents were defeated in the division by the revealing vote of 105 to 57, and in the next division they lost an amendment designed to permit freedom of preaching in private houses and conventicles.[1]

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[1] *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, December 8, 1646.

[2] *Moderate Intelligencer*, December 21, 1646. *Vide post*, 111 ff., for the passage of the completed ordinance and for the final text.

[3] *Ibid.*, November 4, 1646.

[4] *Ibid.*, January 29, 1647.

The progress of the negotiations with the king and the triumphs which the Presbyterians had won in Parliament caused the usually gloomy Baylie to take a cheerful view of the prospects of his party in late 1646. The Assembly had been troubled by some able and active men in the Commons who aimed at a general liberty of conscience. "But for the most of both houses are right and sound, and the body of the city is zealous against all errors and confusions. . . ." The clergy of the kingdom were on the whole pious and orthodox, while the sectarian leaders were, "except for a very few," heady and unlettered. "If peace were settled, and the armie downe, all here think the noyse of heresies, which now is very loud, would evanishe."[2] Presbyterianism never seemed stronger in England. The *Moderate Intelligencer* complained ruefully of the bigotry of the Presbyterians whose consciences had once been so tender. These men seemed to say, "We are now preferred, grown great in favour with the greatest, and besides, popular: now a fiddle for your conscience, we will make you do as we will."[3]

But rarely in history have appearances been more deceptive. The Presbyterian majority, while apparently secure in religious divisions, had already lost control of the House in all political divisions. Presbyterianism was rapidly waning in prestige because of its fatal Scottish connections and its complicity in the negotiations with the king. Its intolerant measures were goading the Independents into revolt and the army into drastic action.[4] Presbyterianism in England was a minority party whose loyalty was now suspect and whose very existence depended upon the sufferance of an aroused and militant army now thoroughly engrained with the virus of sectarianism.

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[1] *C.J.*, V, 34–35.

[2] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 413.

[3] *Moderate Intelligencer*, January 15, 1646.

[4] See Clarendon's astute comments, *Clarendon State Papers*, §2396 (January 1, 1647), §2405 (January 8, 1647), §2517 (May 19, 1647), and §2522 (May 27–31, 1647).

D. The Collapse of Presbyterian Dominance, 1647–1648

1. Radicalism in the army and the parliamentary reaction; heads of the proposals, March 1647–October 1647

The army, under the guidance of its enthusiastic chaplains and lay agitators, had elevated liberty of conscience as the symbol of its revolutionary demands. In this respect its thought was far in advance of both Parliament and the nation at large, and it was prepared to assert its views with full vigour and assurance. The views of the rank and file on this question appear to have been only slightly more radical than those of the officers of the New Model. It is indeed remarkable that the army refrained for so long from direct pressure upon Parliament.

A momentous and chaotic crisis was precipitated in March 1647, when John Lilburne, certainly one of the greatest agitators in modern times, and his followers presented to Parliament a petition demanding in both political and religious issues far-reaching and revolutionary reforms.[1] The petitioners required Parliament to sweep away the entire corpus of penal legislation, permitting all men to preach and advance their opinions in a peaceable manner.

The House of Commons was indignant at the peremptory tone of the document and was not a little embarrassed because of its source. A committee was accordingly appointed to ascertain the authorship and to examine those responsible for its presentation.[2] When the committee attempted to report a few days later, a number of sympathizers with the petitioners appeared to disturb the hearing in a violent altercation which was not ended until two of the agitators had been arrested.[3] On the following day the petition was again laid before Parliament with a demand that it receive immediate and fair attention and with a sturdy assertion of the right of citizens freely to address Parliament at any time.[1]

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[1] This petition was the first of a series which evolved into the *Agreement of the People*. It does not require extended treatment.

[2] *C.J.*, V, 112.

[3] *Ibid.*, V, 118.

The army was following this controversy with breathless interest. The New Model was cemented on the issue of toleration and an irresistible demand was arising amongst the regiments for some formal guarantee of religious liberty. "Thought and discussion had turned the army into a vast Parliament, a Parliament which regarded itself as a representative of godly men" and which every day grew in its contempt for the conservative and timorous policy at Westminster.[2] During May the army radicals laid their petition before the Commons for a third time. After an acrimonious debate a motion to burn the petition prevailed by the close vote of 94–86, indicating a considerable strengthening of sectarian influence and sympathy in the House.[3] The army agitators promptly renewed the fight by laying a fourth and still more radical petition before Parliament in early June. The Commons were now thoroughly alarmed at the tone of the army, and the abduction of the king on June 4th seemed to lend a sinister tone to the rising wrath of a victorious military. On this occasion the members voted by the close division of 128–112 to postpone consideration of the petition until a later date.[4] Shortly after this division Cromwell left the House to rejoin the army. War appeared to be at hand.

Gardiner detects the strong hand of Cromwell in the *Solemn Engagement of the Army* to which his soldiers subscribed on June 5th.[5] The *Engagement* sought to present soberly and conservatively the religious grievances of the army. The army had been scandalously reproached with plotting the overthrow of Parliament, had been charged with hindering the erection of a Presbyterian government, and had been accused of aiming at the erection of Independency. Its advocacy of liberty of conscience had been distorted into the charge that the army sought a general licentiousness and destruction of discipline in religion. The *Engagement* promised that these calumnies would shortly be cleared by a full and precise exposition of the views of the army concerning religion.[1]

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[1] *C.J.*, V, 119.

[2] Green, *History of England*, IV, 388.

[3] *C.J.*, V, 179 (May 20, 1647).

[4] *Ibid.*, V, 195.

[5] Gardiner, *Civil War*, III, 280–281.

The promised statement of the position of the army on the critical question of religion appeared as the *Declaration of the Army*, issued on June 15th shortly before its march on the capital. It was there declared that the army had no intention of overthrowing Presbyterianism or of forcing the establishment of Independency. It had no desire whatever to usurp the authority of Parliament to form and ordain a religious order for England. But it did insist that any establishment set up by Parliament must provide liberty of conscience for those who were compelled as an act of faith to dissent from it. Men must "not for that be debarred from the common rights, liberties, or benefits belonging equally to all . . . while they live soberly and inoffensively towards others, and peaceably and faithfully towards the state."[2]

The issue of religious toleration had now reached a crisis in England. The army was lending dramatic and overpowering publicity to a doctrine already widely and powerfully held in the nation. Petitions from lay and sectarian quarters poured in to support and enlarge the army's position. The Presbyterians were rapidly losing their following in the country at large and when, on June 23rd, Parliament rejected the *Declaration* the struggle for liberty of conscience was for the first time fully precipitated in its halls.

In late June the Independents, still gravely concerned by the threat of a civil war in which the ugly passions of religion might well be released, sought in a last hopeless gesture to find some basis for the accommodation of Presbyterianism and sectarianism. The House of Commons created a committee of "such persons as they shall think fit, of moderation, piety, and learning . . . who shall have power to take into consideration heads of an accommodation."[3] A committee consisting of Carroll, Burgess, Bridge, Strong, Manton, Whitaker, Valentine, Wharton, Carter, Salwey, and two others was immediately appointed with instructions to bring in a "better settling of religion" in relation to those who could not conform to the Presbyterian discipline.[1]

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[1] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VI, 512.

[2] *Ibid.*, VI, 569. Gardiner regarded Ireton as the principal author of the *Declaration* (*Civil War*, III, 295).

[3] *C.J.*, V, 228.

The Committee on Accommodation had not begun its hopeless sittings, however, before Parliament was paralysed into almost complete inactivity by the summer negotiations between the army captains and the king, undertaken in the desperate effort to find some basis for a constitutional and religious settlement.[2] It appears that Cromwell and Lambert had an audience with Charles on July 4th,[3] and shortly thereafter both Cromwell and Fairfax expressed themselves as committed to a policy of toleration which would admit not only Anglicans but Catholics to a limited liberty of worship.[4] Hyde was greatly encouraged by the reasonable temper of the army leaders and was much impressed by the strength and the conciliatory attitude of the Independents.[5] The king, however, proved as unreliable and shifty as heretofore. Now courted by both the Presbyterians and the army he "became so confident of his own interest, as to think himself able to turn the scale to what side soever he pleased."[6] His more realistic advisers sought frantically to bring him to a sane appreciation of his helpless position, even urging him to accept the incendiary Hugh Peters as a chaplain.[7] The king, however, was as obstinate as he was misinformed. He questioned the sincerity of Cromwell, doubted the strength of the army, overestimated the influence of the Scots, and above all exaggerated his own strategic position as mediator between the two rival factions. Charles employed these negotiations merely as an expedient to gain time and to drive the Scots irretrievably into the royalist camp. The negotiations were at least important, however, in that they enabled the army leaders to frame more explicitly their hitherto nebulous support of the principle of toleration. On June 17th Ireton laid his proposals for a settlement before the army council, and on the following day Fairfax appointed a committee of twelve officers to give the recommendations polished and definitive form.

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[1] *The Perfect Weekly Account*, July 1, 1647.

[2] Little can be added to Gardiner's masterly chapter on these negotiations. We shall concern ourselves strictly with the consideration of the religious problem.

[3] *Clarendon State Papers*, §2544.

[4] *V.P.*, xxviii, 16. Cf. Gardiner, following Bellièvre's somewhat questionable despatch (*Civil War*, III, 316–317).

[5] *Clarendon State Papers*, §2551, §2554 (July 8, July 15, 1647).

[6] Ludlow, Edmund, *The memoirs of Edmund Ludlow, lieutenant-general of the horse in the army of the commonwealth of England, etc.* (ed. by C. H. Firth) (Oxford, 1894), I, 155.

[7] *Ibid.*, I, 156.

The *Heads of the Proposals*, which the committee submitted a few days later, constitute an important landmark in the development of religious toleration. The *Proposals* systematized and formalized the vague and somewhat inchoate demand for religious liberty now so widespread in England. Though the immediate objectives of the *Proposals* were not to be realized, their intent and spirit were never wholly to disappear from the realm of active political and theoretical discussion until some measure of legal toleration had been achieved in England.[1] The document was broadly conceived, considering the status of every important religious group in England, and recommending at least a tolerable position for each communion within an ecclesiastical structure of great latitude. It tacitly admitted the Anglican Church with its episcopal government, though an act of Parliament was envisaged which would deprive the bishops and other ecclesiastical officers of all coercive jurisdiction. Existing legislation compelling the use of the Book of Common Prayer or enjoining penalties for nonconformity should be repealed.[2] The Covenant should not be enforced upon the conscience of any man, and freedom of religious assembly outside the contemplated Establishment should be guaranteed by law. These provisions offered protection to every organized religious group in England save the Roman Catholics. This communion created problems of a special nature which should be dealt with by specific legislation.[3]

These *Proposals* secured the enthusiastic support not only of the sectaries but of the moderate Anglican party. Bishop

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[1] Tanner, J. R., *English Constitutional Conflicts of the Seventeenth Century, etc.* (Cambridge, 1928), 148.

[2] Shortly before, the army had requested the House to give effect to this provision by discharging all persons who had been indicted or convicted under charges of attending illegal religious assemblies. (Whitelocke, Bulstrode, *The Memorials of English Affairs, etc.* (Oxford, 1853), II, 181; *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, July 20, 1647.)

[3] For the full text of the document *vide* Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VII, 731 ff. (mispaged).

Skinner (Oxford) wrote that "in such a strait, such a toleration is . . . not only lawful, but expedient,"[1] while Warner (Rochester) urged the king to accept the settlement until power be given him by God to reduce the sects "by a Christian and meek way, to one right and well grounded religion."[2] Ussher and Hall, who had long favoured a more moderate and comprehensive Church, were inclined to lend their support to the plan upon positive as well as politic grounds.

The king was uninfluenced by his more moderate and realistic advisers. The *Heads of the Proposals*, submitted to him on July 23, 1647, enraged him because of their severe constitutional demands and were categorically rejected to the amazement of Ireton and, indeed, of his own advisers. The king now felt certain of Scottish support and was in a completely intransigent mood. Negotiations were not, however, broken off immediately. Ireton and Cromwell continued to press Charles to accept the *Proposals*, assuring him of the complete loyalty of the army if he would do so.[3] The king wrote on September 9th that he found the religious provisions of the *Proposals* more satisfactory than any solution hitherto presented to him, though certain modifications would be necessary.[4] Charles was very evidently engaged in a desperate procrastination until Scottish assistance should be forthcoming. Only by the most urgent representations were Cromwell and Ireton able to restrain the rising wrath of the army. Cromwell was driven into the position of defending the crown and the constitution against mounting radicalism and impatience amongst his own supporters. His position was untenable for long, and when it became clear that the king had no genuine interest in concluding a settlement with the coalition of parties now under his leadership, the great general on October 14, 1647, supported the resolution of the army council to abandon further negotiations with Charles I. The last possibility of a moderate and catholic settlement of the religious problem upon a truly national basis disappeared with this resolution. The king's perversity drove Cromwell and his hosts farther to the left and a more radical and hence less enduring settlement of religion was the inevitable consequence.

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[1] Cary, Henry, *Memorials of the Great Civil War, etc.* (L., 1842), I, 329.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 346.

[3] Gardiner, *Civil War*, III, 358.

[4] *L.J.*, IX, 434–435; Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VII, 810–811.

The army was now prepared to take sovereignty into its own hands. In early August Fairfax had entered the capital with his troops on the grounds that Parliament was no longer able to maintain order. The Independents in the city and at Westminster were vastly encouraged by this turn of affairs. They were still a minority, albeit a strong minority. As late as July, Clarendon had written with accuracy that the city, "upon whose influence the parliament wholly depended," appeared solidly Presbyterian. Public officials were all soundly orthodox and "all who were notorious to be of any other faction in religion had been put out, and lived as neglected and discountenanced men, who seemed rather to depend upon the clemency and indulgence of the state for their particular liberty in the exercise of that religion they adhered to, than to have any hope or ambition to be again admitted into any share or part in the government."[1] But if his royal master was deceived by this appearance of Presbyterian strength, Clarendon was not. The Independents were daily gaining ground in both Parliament and the city. Men engaged in the defence of religious liberty were coming to identify Presbyterianism with Parliament and were hailing the army and Cromwell as deliverers from spiritual tyranny. Speakers and pamphleteers inveighed against Presbyterianism as more bigoted than episcopacy and demanded that the new constitution of the State should afford guarantees against this and all other species of religious tyranny. To this proposition the army had dedicated itself.[2] The Presbyterians had learned nothing from the ominous events of the past four months. They were still pressing the Covenant on all sides. "The Anabaptists and other sects, which began to abound, were punished, restrained, and discountenanced; which the army liked not, as a violation of the liberty of tender consciences, which they pretended was as much the original of the quarrel as any other grievances whatsoever."[3]

The Presbyterians displayed a political pertinacity born of certainty of election and infallibility of knowledge. They remained uncowed by military pressure in the important divisions in Parliament, and by mid-August were showing their teeth to the army.[1] The demand of the army and of the sectaries for a purging of the House was steadily heightened by the stubborn fixity of the Presbyterian resolution. And on August 20th Cromwell, by a show of force, delivered control of the Parliament to the Independents when numerous Presbyterians deemed it prudent to absent themselves.[2]

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[1] Clarendon, *History*, X, 106.

[2] *Ibid.*, X, 79.

[3] *Ibid.*, X, 122.

The Independent and Erastian leaders in the House of Commons had not, despite recent events, abandoned the hope of effecting some tolerant and moderate religious settlement, nor were these members disposed to abandon the Church to the spiritual anarchism so rampant in the army. The hope was expressed that the Presbyterians might in the face of the peril of losing all concede something in order to allay the fears of moderate men.

In accordance with this resolution it was moved in the Commons to settle the Church of England in a Presbyterian form,[3] with "exemption of such tender consciences as cannot conform to that government."[4] About one hundred and fifty "old members" were absent from the House during these early debates and it was hoped that some settlement might be arranged which would be reasonably agreeable both to Presbyterianism and to Nonconformity.[5] The way was cleared for such an agreement by a motion carried in the Commons expressly excluding from toleration any who should disturb the peace of the realm, declaring Romanists to be under the restraint of the penal laws, and prohibiting the printing or preaching of any doctrine contrary to the fundamentals of the Christian faith.[6] Following this carefully worded resolution a motion was introduced in the Lords setting up a Presbyterian government and discipline for a term of three years, but providing that "no person shall be liable to any question or penalty, only for non-conformity to the said government . . . and that such persons as shall not voluntarily conform . . . shall have liberty to meet for the service and worship of God, and for exercise of religious duties and ordinances in any fit and convenient places" so long as they do not disturb the civil peace.[1] Recusants were specifically excluded from the benefits of these provisions, as were persons who denied the Apostles' Creed or who were guilty of overt blasphemy. Nor was any person to be exempted from the provisions of 1 *Elizabeth*, c. 2, requiring attendance at some religious service every sabbath.

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[1] *C.J.*, V, 271, 273, *et passim*.

[2] Gardiner, *Civil War*, III, 352.

[3] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VII, 834.

[4] *C.J.*, V, 327; *Perfect Diurnall*, October 6, 1647; *V.P.*, October 24, 1647, xxviii, 24, 25.

[5] *Perfect Diurnall*, October 9, 1647.

[6] *C.J.*, V, 332–333; *S.P. Dom., Charles I* (1645–1647), *Newspaper Collect.*, I, 594–595.

This bill may be regarded as the most liberal and tolerant proposal for the accommodation of dissent hitherto introduced in Parliament. It was designed to give legal protection and toleration to every religious communion in England save the Catholics, the Unitarians, and isolated fanatics. Certainly it may be said to have included all but a small fraction of Englishmen within its broad limits. Unfortunately, however, the measure was foredoomed by its very liberality. The Presbyterian members undertook in very close divisions to emasculate the bill by amendments. The clause requiring attendance at church each sabbath was first approved by a vote of 68–60, but in the next division the provision establishing Presbyterianism for a trial period of three years was defeated 38–35, and a subsequent compromise proposal extending the period to seven years was lost 41–33. Agreement upon any specific period was patently impossible in view of Presbyterian rigidity, and the question was resolved by erecting Presbyterianism as the national worship until the next session of Parliament should undertake to review and settle the question.[2]

On the following day the Erastians, led by Selden, attacked the exclusion of the Roman Catholics from toleration, comparing them not unfavourably with the Presbyterians who were elevated to leadership under the provisions of the bill.[3] No charge of a spiritual nature had been brought against the Catholics, and Selden challenged the orthodox to sustain their hatred by scriptural and factual evidence. This vanguard action was more than futile, for the Presbyterians in the next division demolished the tolerant character of the provisions.[1] Sequestered Anglican ministers were likewise prohibited from preaching by an amendment which, however, permitted all ministers who could not conform to Presbyterianism to "preach . . . in any church or chapel" where they shall be called by the inhabitants, "provided that it be not at such hours as the minister of the said parish doth ordinarily preach himself."[2]

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[1] Rushworth, *Historical Collections, VII*, 840; *Perfect Diurnall*, §220, §221; *Moderate Intelligencer*, §134 (October 13, 1647).

[2] *C.J.*, V, 332.

[3] *Clarendon State Papers*, §2624 (October 14, 1647).

The Presbyterians had displayed complete inflexibility in these debates while the Independents were evidently not sufficiently devoted to the principle of genuine liberty of conscience to preserve party discipline in the numerous divisions on the bill. A remarkable opportunity to achieve a lasting and moderate settlement in religion had been lost. Had the measure passed in its original form, the king could have been forced to accept it under pain of finding himself without semblance of support in England. The Scots could not in the logic of their convictions have accepted it graciously, but they could have been excluded from English affairs, if need be, by the arms of the New Model. As it was, Parliament had failed irretrievably and the discussion of the issues involved passed immediately and decisively to the army when on October 28th the debates were begun in the council leading up to the momentous *Agreement of the People*.

2. COALESCENCE OF THE OPPOSITION: DISCUSSIONS IN THE ARMY AND IN PARLIAMENT; THE ORDINANCE AGAINST BLASPHEMY; COLLAPSE OF PRESBYTERIANISM, OCTOBER 1647–DECEMBER 1648

The agitators in the army could be restrained no longer, and, after the bitter defeat which they had sustained at the hands of

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[1] *C.J.*, V, 333. The indulgence, as to tender conscience shall not extend to "tolerate the use of Common Prayer in any place whatsoever."

[2] This amendment represents an important retreat from the earlier Presbyterian position (*vide ante*, 57) to which irresistible opposition had developed. Typical of many similar petitions on this question was one favourably considered by both Houses on October 6, 1647, which emphasized the great need for preaching throughout the realm. The petitioners requested that judicious, moderate, and able men who had not been ordained according to the manner prescribed by law might enjoy liberty to preach. (*Moderate Intelligencer*, October 6, 1647.)

The proposal, as amended, was to be presented to the Scottish Commissioners and to the king before the end of the year.

Parliament, Cromwell and his followers in the army council were disposed to give them rein. Some days earlier the radicals had presented their demands to the officers. They required, so far as religion was concerned, "that all statutes for the Common Prayer Booke, and for enforcing all to come to church, whereby many religious and conscientious people are daily vexed and oppressed, be fortwith repealed and annulled," as well as the statutes prohibiting the holding of private religious meetings.[1] When the council of officers convened at Putney on the 28th, Cromwell declared that England must face the issue of liberty of conscience squarely and honestly. Too many have prated of liberty in religion without any willingness to extend its benefits to others. "I think," he concluded, "there is not that equality that [is] professed to be amongst us."[2] Rainsborough followed in support, declaring, "for my parte I thinke I shall never doe any thinge against conscience, and I shall have those hopes of others. That which is deare unto mee is my freedome. Itt is that I would enjoy, and I will enjoy if I can."[3] The great debate was opened in this temper with many things argued "which are not thought fit to be presented at present to the publique view."[4] On the following day the council continued its deliberations, and "sate very close from morning untill night."[5] Within a few days it had agreed upon the fundamental principle "that matters of religion, and wayes of Gods worship, are not at all intrusted by us to any human power, because therein we cannot remit or exceed a tittle of what our consciences dictate to be the mind of God, without wilfull sin."[6] The council had determined to grapple squarely with the problem of toleration, and as rumours of its resolution spread abroad the conservative *Mercurius Pragmaticus* lamented that no one knew what religion England was to have; "whether protestant, popish, or Turkish; for if any one were pitch'd upon, it were a sin against liberty of conscience." The army has shown itself determined to make of liberty of conscience a tool which "must knock downe all order and government in the church."[1]

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[1] *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, October 19, 1647.

[2] Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, III, 369.

[3] *The Clarke Papers, etc.* (ed. by C. H. Firth) (L., 1891–1901), I, 273.

[4] *Perfect Weekly Account*, October 29, 1647; cf. *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, §232 of even date.

[5] *Perfect Diurnall*, October 29, 1647.

[6] *Ibid.*, November 1, 1647.

Cromwell's attitude towards the extremist proposals of the *Agreement* exhibits him as torn between the conservatism of his instincts and the radicalism which fate was thrusting on him. He reminded the Levellers that it was easy to design a plausible frame of Church and State on paper, but quite another matter to find a permanently acceptable solution which would unite rather than distract the nation.

The revised *Agreement* was the work of a joint committee of Independents and Levellers. The clause dealing with religion stipulated that the Christian faith should be held as the public profession of the nation. The people should be instructed in religion "in a public way, so it be not compulsive." Heresy and error should be confuted and reduced by the spiritual weapons of a clergy to be maintained as Parliament should determine. The National Church thus created should enjoy no coercive power, but should win men by means of sound teaching and doctrine. All persons professing faith in God by Jesus Christ, "however differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship, or discipline publicly held forth . . . shall not be restrained from, but shall be protected in, the profession of their faith and exercise of religion, according to their consciences, in any place except such as shall be set apart for the public worship." Men shall be limited in the exercise of religious freedom only by the normal restraints of law and order. These benefits of toleration were not, however, to be extended to Romanism or Anglicanism.[2]

The text of the *Agreement* was neither as liberal nor as carefully considered as the earlier *Heads of the Proposals*. However, it is of greater historical importance in that it fused the thought of a very considerable body of English opinion and because it was to be constantly before the forum of public discussion until it received important enlargement a year after its first consideration. During a critical and formative period in English history the *Agreement* was to provide a platform for the discussion and debate of the great issue of liberty of conscience.[1]

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[1] *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, November 2, 1647.

[2] Bernstein, Eduard, *Cromwell and Communism; Socialism and Democracy in the Great English Revolution* (L., 1930), 85, holds that this restrictive clause was adopted because of pressure from the conservative elements in the council. The earlier and more radical text did not expressly exclude either communion from toleration.

The *Agreement of the People* is the formal indication that sectarianism had attained a decisive and mature influence in English religious and political thought. We have pointed out from time to time that radicalism had been nurtured by Presbyterian intolerance and that the very inflexibility of Calvinism had crystallized sectarian resistance under the capable leadership of Independency. "Liberty of conscience was now become the great charter, and men who were inspired preached and prayed when and where they would."[2] Sectarianism had captured the New Model,[3] and the army was the dominant force in English politics. Many of the Presbyterian officers had resigned their commissions or had been converted, and vacancies were filled by men of more radical religious persuasion. The breach between the army and Parliament in June 1647, demonstrated that three-fourths of the officers were loyal to Cromwell's leadership, while the 167 Presbyterians who seceded were promptly replaced by sectaries.[4] The Independents had early seen the importance of converting the army, and the ablest preachers of the party had served as field chaplains while their Presbyterian colleagues had been safely and comfortably immobilized in sequestered livings. Amongst the troops the more radical sects had found a fertile missionary field, and the central core of Independency in the army was by 1647 surrounded by a periphery of sects of amazing fanaticism and enthusiasm.

The forces of sectarianism were thus highly disciplined, ably led, and now resolutely determined. There was in the army a strong conviction that direct action must be undertaken in view of the intransigence of the king and Parliament, though Cromwell had opposed this view with the most determined strength. A mutinous outbreak in Harrison's regiment was sternly repressed, and another period of negotiation was begun. Parliament had in October passed a heavily amended bill for the erection of an Establishment, with a limited toleration for Independency, whose unsatisfactory character had precipitated the debates on toleration in the army. The hopelessness of any agreement with the Presbyterians was conclusively demonstrated when in December 1647, the parliamentary proposal was laid before the Scottish Commissioners for their approval. The parliamentary memorandum was instantly rejected, largely because of the "liberty granted for all sorts of service and worship of God, and for the exercise of all such religious duties and ordinances as every person shall please, and his own erroneous conscience shall dictate unto him." Parliament would by this measure open the door to atheism and to "liberty of conscience, being indeed liberty of error." The proposed Establishment would abandon the godly and orthodox uniformity of the Covenant for "a vast deformity or multiformity, of heresies and sects. . . ." Such a vile toleration would destroy the very structure of both Church and State. Even the Unitarians, it was pointed out, were restrained only by the mild provision prohibiting them from preaching and writing. Those who are "endued with the light of the gospel" and who love truth will "detest and abhor" such a settlement of religion.[1]

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[1] For the important later debates *vide post*, 120–131.

[2] Clarendon, *History*, X, 175.

[3] Firth, C. H., *Cromwell's Army* (L., 1902), 319; Piette, Maximin, *La Réaction de John Wesley dans l'Évolution du Protestantisme* (Brussels, 1927), 140; Taylor, Adam, *The History of the English General Baptists* (L., 1818), I, 125.

[4] Firth, *Cromwell's Army*, 319.

The sturdily orthodox Scots, now abandoned even by the moderate Presbyterians in Parliament, were driven squarely into the arms of the king. On December 26, 1647, an engagement was undertaken with Charles whereby Presbyterianism was to be established for three years, during which time the Westminster Assembly, to which Charles was to appoint twenty members, should frame recommendations to the king and Parliament for the settlement of a permanent church system. The king further expressed his entire willingness to assist his new allies in extirpating "the opinions and practices of Antitrinitarians, Anabaptists, Antinomians, Arminians, Familists, Brownists, Separatists, Independents, Levellers, and Seekers, and generally for the suppressing of all blasphemy, heresy, and schism."[2] The complete duplicity of the king was again demonstrated, for less than a month earlier he had formally submitted a proposal to Parliament which extended toleration to all the sectaries save those denying the fundamental primitive creeds of the Church.[1] The Independents, strongly supported by the army, were now firmly convinced that nothing but dissension and delay could be gained from further negotiations with the king. Early in the new year (January 3, 1648) the House carried by a vote of 141–92 a motion to desist from further negotiations with Charles, declaring it high treason to carry on unauthorized treaties with him.[2]

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[1] *L.J.*, IX, 591 ff.

[2] *Clarendon State Papers*, §2685 (December 26, 1647).

The decision was reached by a coalition of the Independents with the moderate Presbyterian members remaining in the sadly decimated Long Parliament. Having successfully co-operated in this delicate and important resolution, the House of Commons undertook to complete its religious programme. The Presbyterian Establishment was to be erected with the tacit understanding that the principle of religious toleration was to prevail for the dissenting Protestant sects. In the enthusiasm of this agreement Parliament displayed a singular liberality and tolerance. In late December a member had moved that the great moderate primate, Ussher, who had been preaching at Lincoln's Inn, should be given express permission to continue his ministry there. By the close vote of 92 to 88 the prelate was exempted from the laws governing unlicensed preaching and was likewise invited to sit as a member of the Assembly.[3] Parliament made it clear, however, that it contemplated no general relaxation of the laws regarding Anglican ministers. Numerous complaints had been received against Anglican services which were being conducted rather widely in the city, and the Commons ordered its committee "to send for and examine such ministers as have adhered to the enemy, and preach now in the kingdom, and such as have of late, and now do cause the Book of Common Prayer to be read. . . ."[4] Further evidence that there had been a considerable relaxation of Puritan rigidity during the period when liberty of conscience was under almost universal discussion is afforded by the report that on Christmas Day (1647), "the ministers and magistrates of the city . . . laboured . . . to hinder the decking out of places with rosemary, bayes, holly, and ivy" and sought to break up unauthorized Anglican services. But despite these orthodox exertions, it seems that many houses were decorated in the traditional, if superstitious, manner and numerous churches provided spiritual solace for the sorely beset Anglicans.[1]

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[1] Gardiner, S. R., *Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, 1889), 243–246.

[2] *C.J.*, V, 415.

[3] *C.J.*, V, 393; *Perfect Diurnall*, December 20, 1647, January 8, 1648.

[4] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VII, 938, 944; *Perfect Diurnall*, December 20, 1647.

The equable and liberal temper of Parliament was maintained in the reply which it returned to the Scots regarding the rejection of its earlier measure concerning church government.[2] The members declared that true religion implied an intimate spiritual relationship between God and man, and it was consequently impossible for any human power to compel men to truth or to restrain them from "believing what God suffers their judgement to be persuaded." Parliament did not, however, intend to establish an absolute liberty in the outward forms of worship. The bars of discipline and sound doctrine were not to be relaxed. But it could not and would not persecute men who attested to the same faith as did the national Church.[3]

Upon the basis of this enunciation of principle, Parliament proceeded to the attempt to complete the establishment of a modified Presbyterian Church so loosely imposed as to permit the sects to flourish within its comprehensive limits. An earnest appeal was addressed to the several counties, urging them to set up the administrative and disciplinary machinery of Presbyterianism,[4] while "an ordinance was read in the house . . . for setling the presbyteriall government in this kingdome, and for removing of obstructions therin, which after some debate was assented unto."[5] At about the same time the House of

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[1] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VII, 944; *Perfect Occurrences*, December 25, 1647.

[2] Dated February 17, 1648.

[3] *Parliamentary History*, XIX, 23.

[4] Thus far little success had been experienced by the Presbyterians in establishing classical government in the provinces. Two counties had erected presbyteries and the London Model was now reasonably well organized. The parliamentary exhortation just mentioned apparently had little or no effect. (*Clarke Papers*, II, 1.)

[5] *Perfect Diurnall*, January 28, 1648, January 31, 1648.

Commons began its consideration of the Confession of Faith which the Westminster Assembly had at last completed after so many vicissitudes.[1] On March 22nd the Westminster Confession was approved by Parliament without substantial alteration or amendment.[2]

The formal structure of the Church having been completed, Parliament returned to the task of providing penal legislation which would guard the fundamentals of faith against the assault of fanatical heresy and heinous blasphemy. We have followed in some detail the earlier debates on the Ordinance for punishing of blasphemers and heretics,[3] which was now rushed to completion. In these discussions the measure had received steady and courageous opposition from the Independents and Erastians, who discovered in it an attack upon liberty of conscience which might by construction be indefinitely expanded. In the debates immediately preceding its passage the Independents do not appear to have opposed it as a party and it was carried without substantial difficulty. Several reasons may be argued to explain this defection of the Independents from sectarian opposition. During the past twelve months serious radicalism and heresy had for the first time become rooted in England. Men of conservative temper as well as the godly were not disposed to permit the disintegrating tendencies of sectarianism to go unchallenged, and it is clear from the provisions of the bill that only extremely eccentric variations from orthodox doctrine were to be brought within its punitive provisions. Reports were coming in of new and violent opinions which existing laws were admittedly powerless to correct,[4] and the measure was conceived by the Independents as defining with reasonable liberality the outer limits of enthusiasm in the Christian State.

The general agreement displayed in the debates on the bill was likewise not uninfluenced by political considerations. A precarious but essential working alliance had been formed between the Independents and the moderate Presbyterians which would have been instantly destroyed by Independent opposition to this one tangible monument to Presbyterian persistency and rigidity. The Scots were alienated; the king had acquired a new and menacing appearance of strength by his engagement with the northerners; the fruits of the Civil War were in pawn to fortune and were not to be sacrificed for the benefit of an occasional Socinian or an unbalanced atheist.

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[1] *C.J.*, V, 443 (January 26, 1648).

[2] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VII, 1035; *Perfect Diurnall*, March 22, 1648; *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer* of even date.

[3] *Vide ante*, 90–93.

[4] Typical of these reports is one from the judges on the Norfolk circuit concerning a man held for "words full of horrible blasphemy concerning the divinity, and the death and passion of our Saviour." (*Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, April 6, 1647; *Moderate Intelligencer* of even date.)

And, finally, the action of the Independents at this time betrays their uncertain and limited devotion to the principle of complete religious toleration. The Independents were as yet stoutly Calvinistic in their theology. As we have previously sought to indicate, advocacy of religious toleration had developed but slowly and imperfectly as part of their religious philosophy.[1] In their heroic struggle against Presbyterian inflexibility they had been thrust considerably to the left of their true position in the quest for allies. They had now attained enough strength to compel a broadening of the base of the Church sufficient to secure the accommodation of their own orthodox doctrines and their imperfectly Calvinistic church structure. They were now concerned rather more with the problems of organization, with the requirements of missionary effort, and with the preservation of their own status than with fighting the battles of their sectarian allies. As Puritanism had disintegrated into its component parts almost instantly after the repressive hand of Laud had been lifted, so Independency was now about to dissolve, the spectre of bigoted Presbyterianism having faded away before a united sectarian opposition. Independency had come of age; it had gained the mantle of respectability, it was now beginning to display the normal psychological attributes of a dominant religious party.

In January 1648 the House of Commons ordered the committee in charge of the dormant blasphemy bill to resume daily sessions.[2] The completed ordinance was debated in the Commons on May 1st, the clause prescribing the death penalty for Socinians alone provoking a division.[1] On the next day the ordinance was passed by Parliament.[2]

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[1] *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration,* II, 219–258.

[2] *Perfect Occurrences*, §57; it was ordered reported out on February 19, 1648.

The ordinance prescribed the death penalty for the more serious category of heresies in the event the convicted person refused to abjure his error. These capital offences included error regarding the existence and nature of God and Christ as well as a rather vaguely phrased clause prohibiting antitrinitarian beliefs.[3] The death penalty was likewise prescribed for persons denying that the Bible was the Word of God, disbelieving in the physical resurrection of Christ, or maintaining erroneous opinions respecting the final judgment. Such heretical persons could be indicted upon the oath of two witnesses before two justices.

It will be observed that the death penalty was prescribed for errors which were very rare indeed in the England of this period. The law clearly included atheism within its scope and, somewhat more uncertainly, Socinianism. Save for isolated and probably unbalanced persons with unusually eccentric beliefs, these groups, themselves almost negligible in size, were alone comprehended. The harshness of the law was further mitigated by the fact that it sought to punish not disbelief but missionary activity. The ordinance tacitly conceded that the legal process was not competent for the punishment of opinion and private belief. The law was to apply only in the event an erroneous teaching was advanced by "preaching, teaching, printing, or writing." Half the case of toleration was conceded by this important restriction of application.

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[1] *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, May 1, 1648; *Perfect Weekly Account* of even date; *C.J.*, V, 548–549.

[2] *Perfect Occurrences*, May 2, 1648; *L.J.*, X, 240, 241.

[3] All persons shall be comprehended under the statute who shall willingly by "preaching, teaching, printing, or writing, maintaine and publish that there is no God, or that God is not present in all places, doth not know and foreknow all things, or that he is not almighty, that he is not perfectly holy, or that he is not eternall, or that the Father is not God, the Son is not God, or that the Holy Ghost is not God, or that they three are not one eternall God . . . [or] that Christ is not God equall with the Father, or shall deny the manhood of Christ, or that the Godhead and Manhood of Christ are severall natures, or that the humanity of Christ is pure and unspotted of all sinne; . . . or that Christ did not die, nor rise from the dead, nor is ascended into heaven bodily, or that shall deny his death is meritorious in the behalfe of beleevers, . . ." or "that Jesus Christ is not the Sonne of God." (*An ordinance . . . for the punishing of blasphemies and heresies. With the severall penalties therein expressed* (L., 1648), 1–2.)

The law was far more explicit in prohibiting the advancement of less serious errors which were by this time wide-spread in England. Thus persons maintaining that all men shall be saved, that man has a free will to turn to God, that there is a purgatory, that the spirit may reveal a rule of faith or life contrary to the Word, that man is bound to believe no more than he can comprehend by reason, that the moral law is no rule of Christian life, that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are not ordinances commanded by the Word of God, that infant baptism is unlawful or without efficacy, that the due observance of the sabbath is not prescribed by the Bible, that the churches of England are not true churches, nor their ministers and ordinances true ministers and ordinances, or that the church government by Presbytery is antichristian or unlawful, were brought within the scope of the law. Persons advancing such errors might be indicted upon the testimony of two sworn witnesses before two justices. If convicted, they were required publicly to renounce their errors before the congregations of their parish. In the event a convicted heretic should refuse to abjure his errors he should thereupon be committed to prison until he "shall find two sufficient sureties . . . that he shall not publish or maintaine the said errour or errours any more."[1]

The more stringent portion of the Blasphemy Ordinance prohibited under pain of death the advancement of opinions which were very rare in England; the second portion sought to prevent by the threat of indeterminate imprisonment the advancement of opinions very generally held in the nation. This latter section of the ordinance may be regarded as the enabling legislation which Presbyterianism had steadily demanded in order to make its discipline effective for the rooting out of the strange opinions spreading so rapidly in England. By a strict interpretation of its provisions the Antinomians, the Quakers, the Baptists, the Catholics, the rationalists, and all of the spawning radical sects would have been outlawed. The ordinance was rendered unenforceable, however, by the fact that it sought to extirpate elements in English religious society quite as strong in their totality as Presbyterianism in whose interests the bill had been passed. The Blasphemy Ordinance was a belated and formal gesture by Parliament to a sorely beset Presbyterianism already sinking rapidly into the status of a sectarian minority.

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[1] *An ordinance . . . for the punishing of blasphemies and heresies*, 3–6.

We have sought to examine the motives which induced the Independents to lend at least grudging support to the Blasphemy Ordinance. In the discussions antecedent to its passage the Presbyterians had been greatly assisted by the clarity and precision of their doctrinal and disciplinary position. The Independents were, as we have indicated, a loose, amorphous coalition of moderates really agreeing on nothing more than the necessity of a limited toleration. The group had been constantly on the defensive and had consequently been unable to gain cohesion through definition. As Dr. Denton wrote to Sir Ralph Verney, they had no liturgy, "they both do marry, christen, pray extempore, bury, and administer the sacraments alike, both of them without ceremonies of cross or rings, and administer the sacrament to all indifferently, whether they sit, kneel, or stand."[1] The Independents had undertaken the vigorous prosecution and conclusion of the war against the king and under the crushing weight of political responsibility were extremely averse to creating further defections in the sphere of politics by too unyielding an opposition to the rather moderate demands of the English Presbyterians. The two parties in Parliament were for the moment cemented by the forbidding political outlook. As a royalist correspondent shrewdly observed, "the Presbyterians and Independents are minded rather to submit themselves to the inconveniences of each others friendship, than by variance to lay themselves open to the prelatical and popish party."[2] This disposition was further demonstrated when on May 6, 1648, the two Houses resolved to maintain the Covenant, though again no provision was made for enforcing it upon the nation.[3]

The structure of Presbyterianism seemed complete when in the late summer Parliament passed an ordinance designed to transform the parish system of England into a classical order which, on paper at least, would have warmed the heart of a Baylie or a Cheynell. The complete arrangement was set out in detail and with great precision, leaving no apparent loopholes in the fence of discipline through which sectarianism might insinuate itself.[1]

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[1] Quoted by Gardiner, *Civil War*, IV, 80, from the *Verney MSS.*

[2] *Clarendon State Papers*, §2785 (May 18, 1648).

[3] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VII, 1102; *L.J.*, X, 247.

These developments in religion acquire an air of unreality when one reflects that the army and a powerful body of sectarian opinion were during these months regarding Parliament with an increasingly restive restraint. During the summer the Royalist-Scottish coalition had dissolved like a mist before the victorious arms of the veteran New Model. With the fall of Colchester, Parliament had repealed the *Ordinance of No Address* with a view towards reopening negotiations with the defeated king, though the army and the sects regarded this effort as both fruitless and dangerous.[2] The protracted and tragic conversations at Newport need concern us only briefly. Once more the Presbyterians, with a complete disregard of reality, pressed for the establishment of their system; Vane, representing the views of the army, argued valiantly that peace might be restored only by a frank avowal of toleration; while the king, hard pressed between these irreconcilable philosophies, sought to create a party out of the divisions of his enemies.

Charles, on September 28th, declared himself prepared to accept Presbyterianism for a term of three years, with a toleration not only of episcopacy but of those who could not in conscience embrace either Presbyterianism or Anglicanism.[3] Parliament immediately rejected this basis of settlement, fearing that the king would endeavour to seek a restoration of prelacy, and being unwilling to grant the large measure of freedom which it would extend both to Anglicanism and to sectarianism during the trial period.[4] The possibility of compromise was destroyed by the rigidly Calvinistic resolution of Parliament. The king declared that he could never consent to the destruction of episcopacy, though in repeated messages to Parliament he sought to define his conception of the episcopal function within its narrowest possible limits.[1]

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[1] *L.J.*, X, 461–474.

[2] Gardiner, *Civil War*, IV, 212–214.

[3] *Clarendon State Papers*, §2934; *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 62; *Perfect Occurrences*, October 10, 1648.

[4] *C.J.*, VI, 41; *Perfect Diurnall*, October 2, 1648.

As Gardiner has so thoughtfully said, "the Presbyterian majority, which had pressed so earnestly for a treaty, had only succeeded in showing its incapacity for understanding the most elementary conditions of human nature, and in giving to Charles a stage on which he could display his own apparent moderation and fairness of mind."[2] On October 27, 1648, the House of Commons rejected categorically the king's proposal, which, it should be noted, followed substantially the demands of the army as formulated in the *Heads of the Proposals*.[3] Always a minority, and now a discredited minority, English Presbyterianism was demanding nothing less than the enforcement of the Covenant, the destruction of episcopacy, the establishment of an exclusive Presbyterian system in England, and the total extirpation of the sects.[4] Though this may be held to demonstrate the piety and stubborn consistency of English Presbyterianism, it was within a few weeks to sweep the party irretrievably from power before the fury of sectarianism solidly buttressed by a wrathful army.

The army and the sects were growing restive and apprehensive as the completely uncompromising temper of Presbyterianism was again displayed in these negotiations. An avalanche of petitions poured in to Parliament demanding that any permanent religious settlement should provide adequately for liberty of conscience and exclude all elements of spiritual coercion.[5] Cromwell complained in a letter to Colonel Hammond that the choice between presbytery and limited episcopacy was a hard one. Religious liberty, he felt, could be preserved only by the recognition of the existence of Independency. But this narrow conception of toleration Cromwell found extremely galling, for he hoped and prayed for a union of all godly people, "Scotts, English, Jewes, Gentiles, Presb^{ns}, Independents, Anabaptists, and all."[1] The army seethed with discontent and the officers were unable, and in many cases disinclined, to curb the rising demand for the punishment of the king and the disciplining of Parliament. This sentiment was cogently expressed in Ireton's *Remonstrance of the Army*, which the council of officers adopted on November 18th and laid before Parliament two days later.[2] The train of events then gathered momentum with great rapidity: a fortnight later the army had occupied the capital and on December 6, 1648, Pride's Purge destroyed the last vestige of constitutional government in England and swept Presbyterianism forever from power. In consequence of its refusal to accommodate itself to the realities of English life, Presbyterianism had lost all. The Presbyterians were no longer the dominant religious party in England.

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[1] Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VII, 1291–1292, 1303; *C.J.*, VI, 49; *L.J.*, X, 560–562; *Perfect Diurnall*, §272, §279.

[2] Gardiner, *Civil War*, IV, 222.

[3] *C.J.*, VI, 62; Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, VII, 1308.

[4] *V.P.*, xxviii, 63, *et vide ibid.*, 57, 64, 71.

[5] These petitions will be considered in connection with the sectarian thought of the period. Typical was a petition (dated September 11, 1648) from "thousands of wel-affected, dwelling in and about London," demanding liberty in "matters of religion and God's worship, from the compulsive or restrictive power of any authority." (*Perfect Diurnall*, §268.)

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[1] *Clarke Papers*, II, 51–52 (November 6, 1648).

[2] Gardiner, *Civil War*, IV, 245; *C.J.*, VI, 81.

II

THE PERIOD OF SECTARIAN (INDEPENDENT) DOMINANCE AND THE QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION, 1648–1660

A. THE RELIGIOUS CONSERVATISM OF THE COMMONWEALTH, JANUARY 1649–APRIL 1653

1. THE GREAT DEBATE ON THE QUESTION OF TOLERATION, DECEMBER 1648–JANUARY 1649

For rather more than a decade an amorphous coalition of sects, united by their common devotion to the principle of religious toleration, were to exert a dominant influence in English religious history. Puritanism, which, at the time of the outbreak of the Civil War, enjoyed an enormous prestige in England, had failed completely to find a solution to the problem of diversity because it had quickly hardened into a Presbyterianism unable to expand its bases adequately for the accommodation of the enlarging spiritual liberalism and diversity of the nation. Presbyterianism had failed because of a peculiar want of resiliency, derived in part from the nature of its philosophy, and in part from the strange inflexibility imparted to it by the uncompromising warfare which it had waged with Rome during a full century upon a score of fronts. Sectarianism was in its turn to fail, principally because it was unable to check the disintegrative principle which lay at the heart of its thought. Sectarianism is by definition fated to a minority status; it thrives most luxuriantly when it exists as a persecuted or repressed movement in protest against a prevailing orthodoxy. By the very sovereignty which it bestows upon the individual conscience, it destroys the substance of the discipline necessary to the exercise of religious leadership. And above all the respectability which spiritual dominance inevitably breeds is fatal to the fibre and vitality of sectarianism.

It was but slowly that English sectarianism, conditioned by three generations of repression, came to realize that power and influence lay within its grasp. It was consequently to be rather more than three years before the godly comprehended that the giant against whom their feeble bolts had been hurled was in fact slain. The period 1649–1653 should, therefore, be regarded as one of transition from traditional thinking on the question of toleration to the relatively free grappling of sectarianism with the perplexing problems raised by that momentous issue.

The purging of the Long Parliament, quite as much as the trial and execution of the king, betokened the destruction of the Presbyterian system. We have previously emphasized the fact that the Presbyterians had enjoyed a very great advantage because of the certainty and the clarity of their religious proposals. Sectarianism had been united, not so much on the principle of toleration as in determined opposition to intolerance. In order to gain and retain power it was now necessary to find some positive programme upon which the army and the sects could unite. We have observed that the discussions centering upon the *Agreement of the People* were rapidly focusing revolutionary and dissenting opinion upon such a platform, both in the political and religious spheres. These discussions were revived in December 1648 at the insistent demand of Lilburne and the radicals. On the day before the council of officers took up the consideration of the new draft of the constitution submitted by the radicals, Lilburne published his proposal as the *Foundations of Freedom; or an Agreement of the People*, a document which was to exercise a profound and decisive influence upon English opinion.

On December 11th the army council began its momentous debates, in which every shade of sectarian opinion was to be carefully explored, upon the draft handed in by Lilburne's committee. The central question involved was the just power of the civil State in religion. The conservatives desired to leave to Parliament large discretion in the control of heresy and error, while the sectaries demanded a frank, formal, and complete disavowal by the State of coercive power in matters of conscience. The debate hinged upon a reservation concerning religion which sought carefully to limit the power of the civil magistrate in these terms: "We do not empower our representatives to continue in force or make any lawes, oaths, and covenants, whereby to compell by penalties or otherwise, any person to any thing, in or about matters of faith, religion, or God's worship, or to restrain any person from the professing of his faith, or exercise of religion, according to his conscience, in any house or place except such as are . . . set apart for the publick worship, nevertheless the instruction or direction of the nation in a publique way, for the matters of faith, worship, or discipline (so it be not compulsive or expresse popery) is referred to their discretion."[1]

The committee of the army council invited several divines from the Assembly and from the leading Independent pulpits to assist it and to participate actively in its deliberations.[2] John Goodwin, the intellectual leader of Independency,[3] enthusiastically supported the proposed reservation though he doubted whether the committee enjoyed power to settle such a problem. He submitted that the "magistrate hath [not] in any way a concession from God for punishing any man for going alonge with his conscience," and declared that some guarantee of religious liberty was necessary for the peace of the realm.[4] Hewitt and Rich replied to Goodwin's clerical doubts by claiming for the lay intelligence full power to settle the problem of religious liberty, while speaking warmly in defence of religious freedom.[5]

The orderly and systematic Ireton chided the earlier speakers for straying from the issue and for needlessly confusing the debate. He reminded them that there was now general agreement that the civil power could not bind conscience. The question now facing England was the discipline, limits, and nature of the Church which Parliament would erect and administer.[6] The radical Sprigg[7] rejoined that Christ's Kingdom required neither a national Church nor the assistance of Parliament. The persecuting power of the State has been destroyed and the surviving instruments of persecution should be reduced as well, lest the magistrates should at some future time be tempted "to breake their owne neckes the faster."[1] The ruler should be restrained from the exercise of a power which does not rightfully belong to him. Waller agreed enthusiastically with this position, holding that "every man had as much liberty as I desire I may have nott to bee restrained."[2] Hugh Peters, in a complicated and rambling argument, appeared to demand a clear and forcible renunciation of the religious power of the temporal State. This problem has for too long cursed Christendom, "nott that God and nature hath left itt soe [doubtful], butt from Diotrephes to this day there hath bin a spiritt of domination."[3] Another speaker, perhaps Wildman, spoke most earnestly in support of Sprigg's position. The ruler should be completely excluded from religious authority. God has made the army the instrument of liberty, and "in matters of religion that's preferr'd by us before life. Lett's have that or nothing,"[4] and abolish that tyranny which the army has subdued. This argument was sustained by Clarke, who held that the army had long since dedicated itself to the principle of complete religious liberty. The magistrate must be deprived of all religious authority, for "noe man or magistrate on the earth hath power to meddle in these cases. As for *meum* and *tuum*, and right betweene man and man hee hath right, butt as betweene God and man hee hath nott."[5] Throughout history the magistrate, by usurping this coercive power over conscience, has despoiled religion under the plea of restraining heresy. This hideous usurpation must be destroyed in England.

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[1] *Perfect Diurnall*, December 11, 1648.

[2] There were forty-five officers present at the debate, in addition to the clergymen.

[3] *Vide post*, 376–412, for a discussion of his thought and career.

[4] *Clarke Papers*, II, 74.

[5] *Ibid.*, II, 75, 78.

[6] *Ibid.*, II, 82–83.

[7] Joshua Sprigg (1618–1684), a radical Independent divine and a notable proponent of religious liberty.

Ireton again intervened to bring the enthusiastic champions of religious liberty to the question before the meeting. It is agreed, he submitted, that the magistrate has no power over conscience. "That is nott the question amongst us. For if that were the question, I should bee sure to give my noe to the allowance of any man [to be punished] for his conscience, and if I had a thousand noes I should give itt, and that as loud as any man." Those present, Ireton implied, were in agreement upon the fundamentals of faith and when they envisaged persecution they contemplated nothing more than the repression of their own faith. But it was now necessary for sectarianism to face squarely the full implications of toleration, for policy had now to be framed in terms of its principles. Was the council prepared to remove all restraint from the hand of the magistrate? Was it prepared to tolerate "any thinge that any man will call religion"? The council agrees that the ruler may not punish godly men, but does it agree that he may not restrain idolatry and atheism? These are grave questions, he concluded, which the godly cannot ignore or solve by platitudes concerning the liberty of pious consciences.[1]

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[1] *Clarke Papers*, II, 86.
[2] *Ibid.*, II, 88.
[3] *Ibid.*, II, 89.
[4] *Ibid.*, II, 92.
[5] *Ibid.*, II, 94.

In the discussions which followed this blunt statement of the issue, Ireton and Nye took the position that the Christian State could not completely ignore the disintegrative tendencies of sectarianism. True faith, however broadly defined, must be protected from the corrupting influence of heresy and idolatry. It is evident that the State cannot interfere with "those things that are truly religious." This was the tyrannous and fatal mistake of prelacy. The ruler cannot restrain the religious observance of godly men, but neither State nor religion can be preserved unless some power be vested in him for restraining those who create disturbances under the plea of conscience.[2] The civil State is clearly vested with a sanction which can be called religious when, for example, it curbs the offences mentioned in the first four commandments. Such offences are unnatural and in punishing them the ruler is guided "by the light he has as a man." The Old Testament evidently not only permits but requires this of the Christian ruler. This jurisdiction appertains to the ruler as a magistrate and not as a priest, and is applicable to all subjects whether within or without the Church. Power in this instance is delegated to the ruler by the dictates of reason and nature and was never abrogated by Christ.[3] The State cannot long endure unless it fulfils its moral duty; its functions cannot and should not be divorced from religion. The representatives of the people, therefore, may frame laws for the public good; they may provide for the benefit of men's souls as well as for their bodies. The State cannot ignore the interests of God and the needs of His Church. Nor can it abandon God's cause to atheism and blasphemy.[1] The religious care imposed upon it by the Old Testament cannot be so lightly dismissed.[2] That which was evil then remains evil still, and that which was punished then should be punished now, though, it may be, with new penalties.[3] The gospels do not prescribe explicitly the government of the Christian State, and Ireton declared himself inclined to the view that the Old Testament prescriptions should guide men in this important and controversial matter.[4] Even natural reason would indicate that crimes against piety are quite as worthy of punishment as civil offences.[5]

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[1] *Clarke Papers*, II, 97–98.

[2] *Ibid.*, II, 111.

[3] *Ibid.*, II, 113–114.

Ireton and Nye were fully cognizant of the responsibility of power. The principle of toleration was for England an untested theory which conservative men believed with reason might lead to the complete disruption of religious life in the nation. Ireton was honest and impressive in his conviction that popery and prelacy, as well as the eccentric sects, could not be permitted licence if either the sectarian establishment or the political organization now contemplated were long to endure. The habit of absolute freedom and the virus of complete individualism spread with ease from religious thinking to political thinking, and both reason and history argued with Ireton that these spheres of human activity had never been and could never be separated. In consequence of this conviction Ireton lent a stubborn and reasoned defence to the principle of authority.

But the sands of history had been running fast in England during the previous decade. Able and responsible men rose in the debates to testify unqualified devotion to the principle of religious toleration which they proposed to incorporate as a keystone in the new fabric of State. These men realized fully the gravity of their words. The great question of toleration was now being debated not in the harmless vacuum of metaphysics but with due reference to the responsibilities of sovereignty. John Goodwin, Wildman, Overton, Rich, Sprigg, Collier and Parker outlined with incisive logic the sectarian reply to the conservative position. This strangely heterogeneous group demonstrated admirably the cohesion which the principle of toleration had given to English sectarianism.

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[1] *Clarke Papers*, II, 119–120.

[2] *Ibid.*,II, 123.

[3] *Ibid.*, II, 127.

[4] *Ibid.*, II, 128–129.

[5] *Ibid.*, II, 130.

Fundamentally, they argued, Ireton was confused concerning the nature of heresy. It does exist and it is a serious blemish upon the Church of Christ. But the spiritual persuasion of Christ and not the temporal arm of the ruler is alone effective in cleansing men of heresy and error. Ireton's position, they held, was really devoid of logic since he proposed to grant to the civil arm a power which Christ had withheld from it.[1] The ruler's authority is strictly civil, whereas all matters relating to the Kingdom of God are purely spiritual. The time has come to deliver England from the thraldom to which she has been subjected in religion. History confirms the view that the magistrate will employ any power conferred upon him in spiritual concerns for the destruction of those who disagree with his peculiar conception of truth.[2]

Nor were these men moved by Ireton's arguments from natural law and from the constitution of the Hebraic commonwealth. Law should be based upon the light of nature, but such positive law by its very definition must be self-evident.[3] And the discussions in which England is now engrossed prove that the coercive power of the ruler in spiritual concerns is by no means self-evident. The arguments from the Old Testament are as poorly based in logic. The magistracy amongst the Jews was chosen and directed immediately by God, while under the gospel the civil power may be godly or it may be carnal. The Jews acted under an immediate, not a general, commandment of God. Abraham was commanded by God to slay his son, but certainly no permanent injunction for all men to kill their sons can be argued from this precedent.[4] "Now God may bee his owne carver. If hee will create and sett uppe magistrates hee may give them what power hee pleases,"[5] but men may not arrogate to themselves the prerogatives of God. Then, too, it should be borne in mind that God ordained for the Jews a perfect commonwealth which he required them to keep pure and spotless. But under the rule of the gospel, the magistrate gains his commission from men and not from God.[6] That jurisdiction is not now a godly or perfect authority, for "the power that is putt into the hands of kinges and princes is moulded and fashioned by the people; and there is scarce any two places in the world where the power[s] of the rulers are the same. Magistrates have soe much power as the people are willing to give them. If [it be] soe now, then if a body of people as the commonalty of this land, if they have nott a power in themselves to restraine such and such thinges, [as] matters concerning false worshippe, amongst themselves, certaine itt is, that they cannott derive any such power to the magistrate, butt hee does act itt of himself, and by an assuming unto [himself] that which was never given unto him."[1]

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[1] *Clarke Papers*, II, 100.
[2] *Ibid.*, II, 108–109.
[3] *Ibid.*, II, 115–116.
[4] *Ibid.*, II, 124.
[5] *Ibid.*, II, 116.
[6] *Ibid.*, II, 117, 124.

Ireton's position was attacked with a logic almost careless of consequences. It is evident that if the magistrate enjoys a power in religion for a moral end then that power is universal. The magistrate may then punish and destroy all those who dissent with complete moral justification. If God had given to all rulers a commandment to destroy idolatry, the result would have been the destruction of the world. For every magistrate is godly according to his own definition. Ireton, the sectaries alleged, envisaged a moral power which the ruler would employ for the extirpation of sin and error. This argument presumes an infallibility which simply does not exist. "Itt is nott easy by the light of nature to determine there is a God. The sunne may bee that God. The moone may bee that God. . . . Indeed if a man consider there is a will of the supreame cause, itt is an hard thinge for [him by] the light of nature to conceive how there can bee any sin committed; and therfore the magistrate cannot easily determine what sins are against the light of nature, and what nott." The magistrate is quite as likely to destroy righteousness as he is to extirpate evil, and quite as likely to err as are the people—indeed, "more probable to erre than the people that have no power in their hands."[2] The judicial laws of the Old Testament upon which the conservatives had based their stand have no binding effect upon those who live under the dispensation of the gospels. The Old Testament prescribed death as the punishment for spiritual error, but the New Testament quite as clearly invests the Church with no other weapon than excommunication.[1] Those who desire to arm the civil State with coercive authority would visit the punishment both of the Old Testament and of the gospels upon those who err, thereby destroying the essence of the philosophy and spiritual discipline which Christ has imposed upon His Church.[2]

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[1] *Clarke Papers*, II, 118.

[2] *Ibid.*, II, 121.

The sectaries had given a noble and reasoned support to the doctrine of complete religious liberty. They denied to the magistrate any coercive power in religion, holding that uniformity of truth must be gained by the spiritual weapons with which Christ has endowed His Church. They declared themselves prepared to engage error, which they deplored quite as much as the conservatives, with none other than spiritual weapons. At the same time, it is evident that these men did not fully realize the gravity of the problem confronting them and England. Sectarianism was opposed by a militant and unsubdued Presbyterianism, by the smouldering resentment of Anglicanism which still attracted the allegiance of the inarticulate mass of Englishmen, and by the ever-present threat of Romanism. In the face of these perils the conservatives in the army and in Parliament were not disposed to relax the Erastian control of Parliament lest "confusion and ruin ensue."[3] To this position the sectaries replied, with sublime and naïve faith in the power of the Word, that the saints had nothing to fear even from Rome. Rome had maintained its dominion by keeping its people blind and under compulsion. Popery would evaporate instantly before the blinding sun of truth. If Romanism advances so rapidly under conditions of freedom, they enquired, how did it happen that all the Dutch were not papists.[4]

The discussions of the restrictive clause were resumed at a meeting of the council on December 21, 1648. There was apparently a heated controversy before the issue was put to a division,[5] though no record of the debate was kept by Clarke. Only the officers were permitted to vote on the resolution not to include the clause "reserving" from Parliament jurisdiction in matters of religion, and the radical strength so notable amongst the sectaries and Levellers participating in the discussion was overwhelmed by the less articulate but more conservative officers. By a vote of 37 to 12, the restrictive clause was eliminated, and it was resolved to insert a special article which should define the limits of toleration.[1]

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[1] *Clarke Papers*, II, 126.

[2] *Ibid.*, II, 128.

[3] *Moderate Intelligencer*, December 14, 1648.

[4] *Perfect Weekly Account*, December 13, 1648.

[5] *Perfect Diurnall*, December 22, 1648.

This article, which was to take final form as *Article nine* of the finished *Agreement*, engaged the attention of the council during the remainder of its session.[2] It proposed to lodge in Parliament the final jurisdiction in religion, while expressly prohibiting it from interference with those who should "profess faith in God by Jesus Christ," save for those adhering to popery and prelacy. Lilburne and his radical supporters were indignant because of the refusal of the council to adopt their more liberal proposal in its entirety, and on December 28, 1648, they presented to Fairfax a strongly worded protest entitled *A Plea for Common Right and Freedom*. They complained that the council had obstructed and altered the *Agreement* in such wise that the finished document bore but slight resemblance to the initial proposal. In particular, the bestowal of religious power upon the ruler vitiated the spirit and substance of the *Agreement*. The council had shown itself timid and vacillating in its care not to offend the Presbyterians too grievously. The council, they accordingly demanded, should be purged of officers who had displayed themselves "tainted with . . . arbytrary power or of persecution for matters of religion."[1]

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[1] *Clarke Papers*, II, 140.

[2] The *Agreement* proposed that "the Christian Religion be held forth and recommended as the public profession in this nation." The public religion should be reformed according to the Word of God and the people should be properly instructed in it "in a public way, so it be not compulsive." Public ministers should be provided for the National Church, whose maintenance should preferably be provided for out of the public treasury. It was expressly stipulated that "Popery and Prelacy be not held forth as the public way or profession of this nation." Furthermore, none should be compelled to uniformity in the public profession, "but only may be endeavoured to be won by sound doctrine, and the example of good conversation." The *Agreement* set out the principle of limited legal toleration of dissent with explicit clarity: "That such as profess faith in God by Jesus Christ, however differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship or discipline publicly held forth . . . shall not be restrained from, but shall be protected in, the profession of their faith and exercise of religion, according to their consciences, in any place except such as shall be set apart for the public worship . . . so as they abuse not this liberty to the civil injury of others, or to actual disturbance of the public peace on their parts. Nevertheless, it is not intended to be hereby provided, that this liberty shall necessarily extend to popery or prelacy." The *Agreement* required further that all laws contrary to the liberty set forth by this clause should be repealed. (Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents*, 280–281.)

When the official draft of the *Agreement* came up for debate again in the council (January 8, 1649), the radicals renewed their attack upon the religious provision. Erbury called the attention of the officers to a petition handed in a few days earlier which requested the repeal of the medieval statute banishing the Jews from England, and which demanded that "they under the Christian banner of charity, or brotherly love, may be againe received and permitted to trade, and dwell in this land."[2] Erbury pointed out that *Article nine*, which restricted toleration to those who "profess faith in God by Jesus Christ," would legally exclude the Jews from England and thereby delay their prophesied conversion.[3] Captain Butler followed to express his great dissatisfaction with the presumption of the council in attempting to define so nicely the limits of truth and error. Truth, he pointed out, has in the past usually flourished under the name of heresy.[4]

In its last important debate on the *Agreement* (January 13, 1649), the council was concerned principally with the political provisions of the document. Before formal adoption was voted, however, Joyce, who had been absent during the debate on toleration, was given liberty to express his views. He argued that the council had erred in its effort to placate the Presbyterians by bestowing upon the magistrate a limited coercive power. It was the duty of the army to "tell the magistrate plainly that hee [has] noe power in the thinges of God either compulsive or restrictive."[5] The conservative majority prevailed, however, and on January 15th the council voted to adopt the modified *Agreement*. Lilburne desired to circulate the document throughout the nation in order to force it through the reluctant Parliament by the very weight of an aroused public opinion. Once more the radical element was overruled, and on January 20th the *Agreement* was laid before Parliament, which promised to bring it up for consideration directly pressing affairs of state permitted.[1]

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[1] Lilburne, John, *A plea for common right and freedom, etc.* (L., 1648).

[2] *Perfect Diurnall*, January 6, 1649.

[3] *Clarke Papers*, II, 172.

[4] *Ibid.*, II, 173.

[5] *Ibid.*, II, 182–183.

The modifications which the council of officers had made in the religious provisions of the *Agreement* indicated that even the sectarianism of the army was still tinged with a Calvinistic dread of heresy and religious eccentricity. The Parliament to which it had delivered the *Agreement* continued to reflect an even more conservative temper. The purge had presumably stripped the House of conservatism, but while this was true in political questions it was by no means true in religion. Independency was very rapidly undergoing that strange metamorphosis whereby a sect becomes a Church and was betraying a godly fear of the further extension of spiritual anarchy. A very strong minority of its members still favoured the erection of a modified Presbyterian system, while the overwhelming majority of the House was not disposed to raise up still more enemies by adding the accusation of soul murder to king murder. Thus Parliament was scarcely able to consider objectively the issue of toleration and for many months postponed debate on the explosive question which could so easily precipitate fatal divisions in a government which had but recently taken the most dangerous and radical action in the history of the nation.[2] Even Presbyterian incendiaries were apologetically disciplined,[3] while the House paid at least lip-service to the Presbyterian Establishment which had been created prior to the execution of the king. Indeed, in early August, the House of Commons declared its intention to set up a Presbyterian government and to arrange for the proper care of the established ministry. At the same time, Parliament sought to placate the army and sectarianism by resolving that the tithe system should be abandoned and by declaring that proper safe-guards for tender consciences would be provided in the proposed Establishment.[1]

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[1] *C.J.*, VI, 122.

[2] Clark, *English Nonconformity*, I, 351.

[3] Thus the officers at Lancaster Castle published a careful memorandum defending the imprisonment there of one Thomas Smith for two sermons preached at Lancaster church. They declared that the imprisonment was not designed to silence the mouth of a minister but to restrain an incendiary. Smith had declared that England could never gain peace until the Scots came to deliver her from the sectaries. The Independents, Anabaptists, and Seekers were all heretics worthy of extirpation. The officers, while disowning all persecution, submitted that such sentiments were dangerous, tending to incite the people and to disturb the peace. (*Clarke Papers*, II, 188–189.)

2. The religious difficulties of Parliament; pressure from the sects and from the army, August 1649–August 1650

These politic manœuvres created in the army the suspicion that Parliament, purged or unpurged, was the creature of the Presbyterians. The council of officers, within a few days after the Resolution of the House had been announced, submitted a petition stating its position and demands in matters of religion in the most forcible language. They required that all legislation restraining the Christian conscience and impeding the propagation of the gospel be immediately rescinded. It was their demand that the spirit of Christ, "flowing forth in his servants for the declaring of his name in the nation, may not be suppressed, but receive all due encouragement, they living peaceably under the present government without disturbing the public worship." At the same time, they did not suggest that blasphemy, prelacy, or popery be legally tolerated under the laws of the land.[2] The House gingerly referred the dangerous questions raised by the petition to its committee charged with drawing up legislation for the protection of tender consciences, and sought to placate the army by ordering it "to meet *de die in diem*, till the same finisht."[3] A few days later (August 21st) further steps were taken to appease the army when a committee was appointed to bring in recommendations ensuring liberty of preaching to pious men who could not accept Presbyterian ordination.[4] Furthermore, in early September, 1649, a bill was introduced for the relief of tender consciences,[5] which, after two readings, was consigned to the oblivion of committee.

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[1] *Perfect Weekly Account*, August 6, 1649; *Kingdoms Faithfull Scout*, §28 of even date.

[2] *C.J.*, VI, 280; *Perfect Diurnall*, August 16, 1649. Cromwell, writing from Milford Haven, supported the petition by demanding legislation for the protection of religious liberty, without, however, suggesting any exceptions.

[3] *Perfect Diurnall*, August 16, 1649; *Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer* of even date; *The Moderate* of even date.

[4] *C.J.*, VI, 282.

[5] *Ibid.*, VI, 295.

Parliament was once more endeavouring to follow a moderate path between the radical demands of the army and the inflexibly orthodox requirements of the Presbyterians in and out of Parliament. An inspired *Declaration* was issued which plaintively submitted to the nation the difficulties which Parliament was encountering in the godly work of reformation. Despite the calumnies and abuses under which it laboured, Parliament was resolved to press on unswervingly to the settlement of public and religious liberty.[1] Grave difficulties had been experienced. No sooner had Parliament purged the old Establishment of profaneness and superstition than a new and intolerant spirit appeared[2] which branded all who dissented from it as heretical and blasphemous and demanded that the State should undertake the repression of all those who differed from it in the least particular.[3] England had been delivered from the renewed threat of ecclesiastical bigotry by a Parliament which was strongly resolved to protect men's consciences, while preserving the State and Church from the universal toleration of error.[4]

The moderate efforts of Parliament were confounded not only by the bigotry of the orthodox and by the insistence of the sects for an unrestricted liberty of conscience, but by the natural effort of the Anglicans to secure greater liberty for their faith. In early September, while the discussion of the petition from the officers was progressing, there had been a concerted effort on the part of the Anglicans in the capital to test the limits of the vaunted parliamentary tolerance. Services according to the traditional rites were held in numerous churches on September 9th. The Book of Common Prayer was read and prayer was offered for Charles II at Paul's Wharf by one Mr. Williams despite the frantic remonstrations of the Lord Mayor. The Anglican was arrested and taken away by a troop of horse just as he was about to go into the pulpit. At another church the Anglican minister was placed under what would today be called "protective arrest" by the military when an angry mob threatened to do violence to his person.[5]

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[1] *A declaration of the parliament of England, in vindication of their proceedings, etc.* (L., September 27, 1649), 7.

[2] The Presbyterians were clearly meant.

[3] *A declaration of the parliament of England*, 11.

[4] *Ibid.*, 13.

[5] *Perfect Diurnall*, September 9, 1649; *Moderate Intelligencer* of even date.

Parliament was grievously exercised by these incidents and by the mounting pressure of a now thoroughly articulate radicalism. Further consideration of the act for the relief of tender consciences was indefinitely postponed, and on October 3rd it was felt necessary to state officially that the House had no disposition to permit a universal toleration and to warn the nation that further abuse of parliamentary leniency would be severely punished. An even sterner position was assumed early in 1650 when it became evident that civil war was again brewing in the north. The support of English Presbyterianism was deemed necessary in the face of renewed political peril, and steps were accordingly taken to salve the conscience of the orthodox, so sorely afflicted by the alarming spread of new and strange opinions. A committee was therefore appointed to bring in recommendations for the curbing of obscene, licentious, and impious practices which, under the colour of religion, were corrupting the purity of faith.[1] A bill designed to extirpate particularly heinous blasphemies and obscenities under pain of banishment was reported out by the committee and debated during the summer.[2] The debates on this bill raised the larger and more delicate question of the treatment of unorthodox sectarianism, however, and the discussions consequently gravitated to a consideration of a new blasphemy act to supersede the hopelessly unenforceable statute of 1648.

The army had been engaged in the prosecution of the war on the young king and his Scottish allies during these months and had therefore not been able to exert its customary opposition to the repressive tendencies of Parliament. Similarly, the Independents and sectaries in the House had been harassed by the political necessity of placating English Presbyterianism and had offered only irresolute protest to the intolerant trend of development in the legislature. But the political crisis had been greatly relieved by the overwhelming victory of Cromwell's forces at Dunbar, and the issue of liberty of conscience was again joined.

A solemn *Declaration of the army of England*, signed by Cromwell and Rushworth, was published on July 20, 1650, protesting most vehemently against the chronic intolerance of

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[1] *C.J.*, VI, 427.

[2] *Ibid.*, VI, 430, 437, 443–444; *Mercurius Anglicus*, September 28, 1650.

Presbyterianism. The nation found it necessary to destroy the king in order to preserve its religious and political liberties from extinction. But these precious gains have been impeded and threatened by the bigotry of the Presbyterians. The nation has been willing to embrace as much of the truth which the orthodox profess as God has revealed to it. Yet the Presbyterians are completely intransigent: "Are we to be dealt with as enemies because we come not to your way? Is all religion wrapt up in that or any one form? Does that name or thing give the difference between those that are the members of Christ and those that are not? We think not so. We say faith, working by love, is the true character of a Christian, and God is our witness, in whomsoever we see anything of Christ to be, these we reckon our duty to love, waiting for a more plentiful effusion of the spirit of God to make all Christians to be of one heart."[1]

3. THE RENUNCIATION OF EXTREMES; THE PASSAGE OF THE BLASPHEMY ACT AND THE REPEAL OF THE PENAL LAWS, AUGUST 1650–SEPTEMBER 1650

This noble and resolute defence of Christian charity and tolerance should have given Parliament pause in its nervous consideration of the blasphemy act. The act, which was passed on August 9, 1650, exhibits the horror with which pious Englishmen viewed the fantastic spiritual anarchism that had begun to manifest itself directly the hand of repression had been lifted a decade earlier. The prior act of 1648 had been passed by a Presbyterian majority and provides a fair indication of the repressive discipline which Protestant orthodoxy was prepared to launch against the spreading heresies of the period. The Act of 1650 was carried by the Independents in coalition with the moderate Presbyterians. The remarkable softening of its punitive clauses is an accurate measure of the ruin which the Presbyterian cause had suffered during the previous two years.

The *Act against several atheistical, blasphemous and execrable opinions* deplored the continued spread of monstrous heresies and loose and wicked practices. The liberty which Parliament had extended had been perverted by many into a licence threatening the very dissolution of society. In order to curb the further growth of such opinions it was ordained that whoever should declare himself to be God, "or in honor, excellency, majesty and power to be equal, or the same with the true God, . . . or whoever shall deny the holiness and righteousness of God," or maintain that "acts of uncleanness, prophane swearing, drunkenness," and the like are not expressly forbidden by the Word of God, or who shall maintain that serious moral offences like murder, adultery, and incest are not of an evil nature, or who shall hold "that there is neither heaven nor hell, neither salvation nor damnation," shall be deemed guilty under the terms of the act. Such a person might be indicted upon the oaths of two or more witnesses and, if convicted, should be sentenced to prison for six months, unless he provided satisfactory surety. In the event of a second conviction such persons should be banished from the commonwealth.[1]

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[1] *Declaration of the army of England upon their march into Scotland, directed to all that are saints and partakers of the faith of God's elect in Scotland* (*S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate,* ix, 114).

The Act of 1650 represents a very great gain for religious toleration when it is compared with the similar legislation of 1648. The clauses dealing with sectarian offences were swept away, as were the complicated portions seeking to define doctrinal orthodoxy. It is doubtful whether any sectary in England whose roots were in the Christian tradition could have been convicted under a fair interpretation of the measure. The Act was designed to punish atheism, immoral practices masquerading under the name of religion, and, regrettably, religious insanity. Specifically, the Act was directed against the Ranters, the Adamites, the Familists, the more violent Seekers, and the extremists amongst the Levellers. The punishment ordained by the act was notably mild, while frivolous accusations were discouraged by requiring the testimony of two witnesses and by the provision that suits must be instituted within six months after the alleged offence had been committed.[2] The law was concerned with moral and not with doctrinal laxity; the conviction that an absolute system of religious truth could be defined had been gravely shaken during the past few years and thereby the greatest single obstacle in the way of religious toleration had been removed.

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[1] *An act against several atheistical, blasphemous and execrable opinions, derogatory to the honor of God, and destructive to humane society* (L., 1650).

[2] Scobell, *Acts and Ordinances*, II, 126.

The evidence would indicate that the blasphemy act was fairly and mildly enforced during the period 1650–1652. The Anabaptists, who had been expressly brought within the jurisdiction of the earlier act, were tacitly recognized by the new legislation and flourished without serious molestation.[1] An incendiary named Lawrence Clarkson was sentenced to prison for one month by parliamentary prescription and was then banished because of the publication of his violent and unbalanced book entitled *The Single Eye*.[2] During about three years not more than a score of persons were convicted under the legislation for offences which may fairly be regarded as religious rather than moral, the latter being punishable under civil law. Most of these cases involved the disturbance of religious assemblies, messianic delusions, atheism, or really serious blasphemy.[3] Parliament was proceeding with great caution in the matter of religious toleration but it was already obvious, as the *Mercurius Politicus* exultantly proclaimed, that Presbyterian dominance had been cast out of England. "No longer shall they sit cheek by jole with the supreme authority, in the state of an assembly to catechise the parliament, and con over their most elaborate confession."[1]

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[1] *Portland MSS., H.M.C., Reports*, II, 30 (December 16, 1651).

[2] *Ordinance respecting Lawrence Clarkson* (L., September 27, 1650); *Mercurius Anglicus*, September 28, 1650; *Mercurius Politicus*, September 28, 1650.

[3] Thus John Robins was imprisoned for maintaining that he was God Almighty (1651), and a man named Tidford was sentenced for supporting Robins in his delusion. One Richard King was sentenced (1651) for claiming that his pregnant wife was to be delivered of the third person of the trinity, while Thomas Kirby was convicted in the same year for holding that Cain was the third person. Elizabeth Storrell was sent to jail in 1651 for holding that her society of saints had power to raise from the dead, while a woman named Joan Robins (perhaps the wife of John Robins) was convicted for maintaining that her unborn child was Jesus Christ. This claim was disputed by still another pregnant woman named Mary Adams, who was sent to jail for a few contemplative days. John Rogers was convicted for heretical opinions concerning universal redemption (1652), while Richard Smalbone was tried, but not convicted, for confused notions concerning good and evil. An unnamed man was sentenced for disturbing Parliament by proclaiming himself Joshua, King of Kings, and one Richard Faulkner of Petersfield, Essex, was sentenced for drinking a health to the devil and maintaining that "our saviour Christ was a bastard, and that his father was a poor carpenter." Eight persons were sentenced to jail on the rather vague charge of disturbing the public peace. (*A list of some of the grand blasphemers and blasphemies, which was given in to the Committee for Religion, etc.* (L., 1653), s.sh.)

The religious legislation of Parliament betrayed the fact that the clerical solution for the religious problems of England stood discredited and that laymen were prepared to attempt at least to carve their way through the jungle of conflicting bigotries in order to seek stable foundations for spiritual peace. Cromwell, writing in September 1650, lent his authority to this determination by rebuking once more the intolerance of the Scots. They had, he argued, displayed too great "an ingenuity in prosecuting the ends of the Covenant." Their tenets cannot be accepted as *ipso facto* infallible but must be submitted to the judgments of all pious men. The Presbyterians have posed as the exclusive interpreters both of the Covenant and the Bible, "counting a different sense and judgment from theirs breach of covenant and heresy. . . ." Christ has no such teaching, for He makes the ministers helpers of the people and not their masters. The pope claims no greater authority than they over the consciences of men. England has forsworn this persecuting philosophy. Punitive action has been taken against some men, but it has been restricted to the maintenance of the peace of the nation and has not been a "personal persecution." The orthodox conviction that religious freedom will encourage the growth of heresy and error "is like the man who would keep all the wine out of the country lest men should be drunk." It is unjust to deny a man that liberty with which nature endows him because of the fear that he will abuse it. Error cannot be overcome by the temporal arm of the state; the "sound words" of the ministry are alone capable of securing its overthrow.[2]

The lay temper was further vindicated by the passage on September 27, 1650, of the important *Act for relief of religious and peaceable people*, which levelled the legal structure of uniformity, whether Anglican or Presbyterian. The Act repealed as injurious to the Commonwealth the Elizabethan

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[1] *Mercurius Politicus*, June 13, 1650.

[2] *Cromwell to Dundas* (Edinburgh, September 12, 1650), Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, II, 125–129.

Act of Uniformity, the *Act for punishing of persons obstinately refusing to come to Church*, the *Act for Retaining the Queen's Subjects in their due Obedience*,[1] and all other acts imposing a penalty for absence from church or for not hearing the Book of Common Prayer. It was provided, however, that "all and every person . . . within this Commonwealth . . . shall (having no reasonable excuse for their absence) upon every Lords Day, days of publique thanksgiving and humiliation, diligently resort to some publique place where the service and worship of God is exercised, or shall be present at some other place in the practice of some religious duty, either of prayer, preaching, reading, or expounding the Scriptures, or conferring upon the same."[2]

The Act should be regarded as a legislative landmark in the development of religious toleration. It swept away the accumulation of a century of progressively intolerant legislation. England was in 1650 without an Established Church, and the Act implied that none was necessary for ordering and maintaining the religious life of the nation. Toleration and equality before the law, at least in private worship, were tacitly extended to all religious communions not expressly forbidden by the blasphemy act. Thus the *Act for Relief of Religious and Peaceable People* certainly comprehended private Anglican services and did not explicitly prohibit Roman Catholic worship. At the same time, however, the penal legislation against priests, against the saying of mass, and against idolatry remained unrepealed and a Catholic would have found it impossible to convince a court that his worship was comprehended under the terms of the Act. But incomplete and transitory as it was, this legislation represents an enormous advance in the direction of religious liberty and compares very favourably indeed with any similar enactment in either the seventeenth or the eighteenth century.

4. THE SEARCH FOR A COMPREHENSIVE FORMULA, SEPTEMBER 1650–APRIL 1653

Parliament had erected the legal framework for a system of religious toleration in England though the question of establishing a national church with all of the formidable problems which it would inevitably raise remained to be considered. During the months intervening before this momentous discussion was undertaken England experienced a period of relative quiet and a remarkably lenient policy towards the diverse religious groups was maintained. The Council of State was still busy with the consideration of ways and means for the better maintenance of religious freedom.[1] Catholicism remained relatively unmolested and private Anglican services were undisturbed save for an attempt by the council to prohibit the traditional rites in the celebration of Christmas in 1650.[2] There was very little articulate demand for the revival of the Prayer Book during the entire decade,[3] while the Anglican requirement for tacit permission to hold private services was respected. The harsh attitude of the Government towards Anglicanism was confined to precautionary measures that "nothing, by pretence of pulpit liberty or otherwise, be suffered . . . to the prejudice of the public peace or the honour of this government."[4] That is to say, the Government was concerned rather with the threat of a Royalist uprising always implicit in Anglicanism than with the prohibition of the spiritual exercise of the traditional religion. The Independents, who were now in a dominant position, disliked any systematic ecclesiastical government and were inclined to delay the definition of the State Church so long as a reasonable curb could be maintained on sectarian extremism. The thousands of parish churches tended during this period of ecclesiastical confusion and governmental laxity to reflect rather accurately the religious views of the local communities. The presentation rights of trustworthy patrons were not disturbed, while in the case of royalists they were vested in a board of county commissioners empowered to choose the minister with the consent of the parish.[5] Benefices formerly in the gift of the crown were vested in the parish, thus vastly implementing the tendency towards decentralization and religious individualism. Presbyterianism, which had suffered grievously from its association with rebellion against the Government, was rapidly sinking to a sectarian status and appeared quite unable to compete with the lusty missionary zeal of the more radical and evangelical sects. Even in its stronghold in Lancashire many parishes declined to set up its discipline, while its influence in the capital was rapidly diminishing.

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[1] 1 *Eliz.*, c.1; 35 *Eliz.*, c. 1; 23 *Eliz.*, c. 1.

[2] *An act for relief of religious and peaceable people from the rigor of former acts of parliament in matters of religion* (L., 1650).

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[1] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate* (*Council of State Proc.*), xv, 8 (February, 1651).

[2] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, xi, 120.

[3] Gardiner, S. R., *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate*, 1649–1656 (L., 1894–1901), II, 13.

[4] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, xxiii, 10 (January 22, 1652).

[5] Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, II, 12.

The tacit understanding of Parliament with extreme sectarianism could not, however, be indefinitely prolonged. The radicals were prosecuting their beliefs with provocative vigour, and respectable opinion was particularly outraged by the reappearance of Socinianism. Biddle, a very able writer and publicist, was suspected of complicity in the publication of an English translation of the Racovian Confession (1652) and was known to be engaged in the open propagation of Unitarian opinions.[1] In early 1652 these facts were brought before Parliament, which immediately resolved that the catechism "doth contain matters that are blasphemous, erronious and scandalous," and ordered the book to be burned.[2]

The complaint against Biddle had been lodged by John Owen and fourteen other leading ministers. The petitioners had indicated the high necessity for settling the public faith of England if religion were to be protected from complete disintegration into sectarianism. Owen, who had formerly been a moderate Presbyterian and had later embraced Independency because of the rigour of the Calvinistic demands, was a powerful preacher and a celebrated writer and controversialist.[3] His representations found a warm reception in a Parliament all too glad to depute the delicate task of framing a national faith to a committee of moderate divines. The House, accordingly, on February 18, 1652, appointed a *Committee for the Propagation of the Gospel*, with rather hazy instructions to propose a permanent settlement of religion in England. The committee, though dominated by Owen, included several of the greatest of the Independent leaders and may be regarded as fairly representative of congregational thought during this period.

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[1] *Vide post*, 203–207, for a discussion of the Biddle case.

[2] *C.J.*, VII, 114; *Votes of parliament touching the book commonly called the Racovian catechism, etc.* (L., 1652) (s.sh.).

[3] *Vide post*, 425–435, for a consideration of Owen's thought.

The committee began its sessions immediately, entertaining suggestions and proposals from various religious groups.[1] The complete recommendations of the committee envisaged an Established Church which should be administered by two commissions, composed of lay and clerical members. The first commission, which should be subdivided into local bodies, was to be charged with the supervision of the ministry. It should be empowered to ordain candidates who could furnish the testimony of six persons, two being clergymen, to their piety and doctrinal soundness, and should in general exercise a helpful and administrative care over the entire clergy. The second commission should be invested with the power of visitation, discipline, and ejection of the clergy. It should delegate its powers to smaller units instructed to go on circuits of visitation, which should hear complaints against ministers, weigh evidence, and remove unfit persons.[2]

The Church thus officially, if loosely, organized should enjoy the emoluments and benefits of a legal national Establishment. The committee proposed, however, that toleration be permitted even outside its comprehensive limits. Persons desiring to meet privately for religious worship might do so in any publicly known place of assembly or by giving due notice to a magistrate. Only one limitation upon this liberty was suggested, and it was so vaguely worded as to indicate the inability or unwillingness of the committee to define the limits of truth. Persons plainly denying the fundamental truths necessary to salvation should be deprived of freedom of worship. This restriction was evidently aimed at the Unitarians, and it is noteworthy that the Catholics and Anglicans were tacitly admitted to the status of tolerated sects.[3]

The committee's original proposal may be regarded as the

[1] *Mercurius Politicus*, April 29–May 6, 1652; *Weekly Intelligencer of the Commonwealth*, March 31, 1652.

[2] The later system of triers and ejectors was clearly foreshadowed in this administrative proposal.

[3] *Proposals for the furtherance and propagation of the Gospell . . . by divers ministers, etc.* (L., 1653).

most tolerant recommendation seriously set forth thus far in the seventeenth century by a responsible body in England. But the tolerant limits of the comprehensive church which it envisaged seemed too confined to Major Butler and five other members. Butler opposed it as restricting the freedom of Christians and declared that religious liberty could not long endure in an established and endowed church even of the most tolerant constitution. In addition, he submitted that the proposal denied toleration to the Jews, thereby clearly contravening the injunction of the scriptures.[1]

The committee was likewise assailed for having left too vague the definition of the fundamentals of faith. This lack of precision displeased the orthodox because it might be interpreted with great laxity, while it was bitterly attacked by the radicals as a potential snare which might well be employed to throttle religious freedom. Owen and his followers accordingly brought forward a list of fifteen fundamental doctrines which were appended to the original proposal when it was printed on December 2, 1652. Most important amongst these tenets were the orthodox doctrines of the trinity, the incarnation, justification by grace, the necessity of forsaking sin, the resurrection, and the general truths that the mind of God may be discovered only in the Bible and that none should despise or forsake the duty of God's worship.[2] The doctrinal system thus proposed was founded upon the pronouncements of the first four councils and had been reduced to the minimum accepted by all the Protestant communions. There was, indeed, hope that some unity might be attained within the latitudinarian structure thus envisaged.

Parliament, however, displayed little inclination to open for debate the controversial subject of church government and doctrine. During the closing months of the year (1652) there was a widespread demand, which the army made articulate, for the dissolution of the fragment of the Long Parliament still sitting and for the election of a new and more truly representative body.[1] Neither the civil nor the religious constitution had been settled, and Parliament appeared far more interested in prolonging its own existence than in grappling with these grave questions. In late January 1653, the army demanded the convention of a new Parliament which should ensure the protection of liberty of conscience without, however, lending encouragement "to such as are popish or profane in the exercise of their superstitious and licentious practices."[2]

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[1] W., R., *The fourth paper, presented by Maior Butler, to the honourable committee of Parliament, for the propagating the Gospel of Christ Jesus, etc.* (L., 1652), 18–19.

[2] *Proposals for the . . . propagation of the gospell, Appendix.*

The reservations which the army now placed upon liberty of conscience provide still another indication that sectarian opinion, in the face of the undiminished spread of radicalism, was rapidly settling itself in support of a policy of toleration for all groups adhering to the bare fundamentals of Christian faith, while excluding the Catholics on the score of idolatry and the Anglicans on the grounds of political necessity. The pressure from the pulpits, the press, and the army for a formal settlement of religion continued without abatement, and Parliament on February 11th began the consideration of the proposals of the committee for the propagation of the Gospel. Just a week later Parliament accepted the report of the committee in principle while reserving the decision on certain details. The committee in these discussions had introduced an amendment to its ecclesiastical constitution which would exempt dissenters from the necessity of reporting to the magistrate their intention to meet privately for worship. The House, however, was disposed to accept the more conservative recommendations of the original proposal.[3] Debate had likewise begun on a second amendment which would have defined more clearly the limits of dissent from the Established Church when on April 20th the long and irreconcilable quarrel between Parliament and the army was resolved by the forced dissolution of the Long Parliament. Cromwell and the army were now revealed as the masters of England.

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[1] Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, II, 164–177.

[2] *Mercurius Politicus*, January 28, 1653.

[3] *C.J.*, VII, 258.

B. The Evolution of the Church of the Protectorate and the Cromwellian Definition of Religious Toleration, may 1653–january 1655

1. Cromwell's views on religious toleration; the discussions by the saints, may 1653–december 1653

Sovereignty was lodged in a new Council of State, in which the military was predominant, and discussions were immediately undertaken in order to constitute a legislative body to assume the work of the recently dissolved Long Parliament. Lambert and the conservative officers favoured a resumption of traditional parliamentary government by a general election, but Cromwell, after some indecision, lent his decisive influence to the view of Harrison that a general election in a troubled period might well be fatal to the cause of the revolution and the interests of religious freedom. It was therefore determined to invite the congregational churches in each county to nominate fit and godly persons, and from this list of nominees Cromwell and the council selected 129 members to constitute the Parliament which was called to convene on July 4, 1653. The members were most carefully chosen to represent the temper of sectarianism and Cromwell hoped to rear with the support of Parliament a tolerant and enduring Church structure. It was soon to be demonstrated, however, that the godly were by no means clear or united in their views, nor did they bring to the support of the principle of comprehension and religious liberty the same consistent devotion displayed by the great general.

Cromwell's views on the subject of religion were not widely understood in England at the time when the Long Parliament had been dissolved. He had been much in the field, had spoken but infrequently in Parliament, had written but little, and had until the trial of the king displayed a conservative spirit which betrayed but slight premonition of the remarkable development of his thought and philosophy after circumstance and reflection had convinced him that revolutionary progress was inevitable and necessary. His religious views were already considerably in advance of the sectarian thought of his period and shortly after the forced dissolution the strength and temper of his resolution became manifest. He displayed a tolerance and magnanimity hardly in sympathy with the fanatical zeal of many of his closest associates. Thus it was noticed that a Presbyterian minister who had been expelled from his pulpit by an Independent was restored by the general's guard.[1] Both the Anglicans and the Catholics were extended an unofficial but effective protection in their private worship.[2] Even more significant was the fact that a young man was permitted to maintain monarchical opinions at Westminster Hall without molestation.[3]

Cromwell's dark and brooding mind is difficult to analyse. Perhaps the most thoroughly sectarian figure in his age, he cannot be regarded as wholly in sympathy with any sect. His faith and intelligence were completely individualistic, illustrating perfectly the intense individualism which is the fruit of the principle of private judgment and free enquiry. Cromwell repeatedly expressed the conviction that he was led immediately by God. This sense of the immanence of God made of Cromwell's will, once resolved, a completely inflexible and cutting instrument which was to cleave through tradition and opposition with an irresistible force. Cromwell's faith was likewise completely unsystematic and anti-dogmatic. The very intimacy of the bond which joined him with God made him impatient of dogmatic niceties and critical of the Puritan disposition to define faith precisely and infallibly. He was, so far as organized religion was concerned, a spiritual anarchist who was willing to extend the principle of private judgment and spiritual freedom to the uttermost limits of the diversity included under the name of Protestantism.

The sources of Cromwell's remarkable tolerance are to be found in the nature of his faith. He held that all men are competent to find God's truth and must be permitted to walk undisturbed in the pursuit of that way which God has ordained they must find. The clerical mind, he consistently maintained, had complicated and distorted the means and nature of faith, and had sought to impose upon men the tyranny of prescription. His solution to the problem of religious liberty was completely lay. While he did not minimize the spiritual capacity of the clergy, he barred them from a position of influence in his government and founded in the sovereignty of the State the firm guarantee of religious liberty. In Cromwell we discover fused in a peculiar amalgam the sectarian devotion to religious liberty on the grounds of moral right, the lay distrust of clerical bigotry, the latitudinarian conviction that all Christians who profess the fundamentals of faith are in a substantial unity, and the Erastian determination to preserve to mankind the benefits of intellectual and spiritual freedom through the restraint of clerical arrogance.

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[1] *Faithful Post* [BM E 211, 25], (later under various titles, and finally as the *Weekly Post*).

[2] *Clarendon State Papers*, II, §1135 (May 6, 1653).

[3] *Ibid.* (news letter), II, 1353.

We have frequently observed that English sectarianism had during the Civil Wars been crystallized into a formidable political and moral force and that it was, under the pressure of Presbyterian bigotry, united only upon the principle of religious toleration. Sectarianism formed the shaft of the spear of which Cromwell was the head. He had come to believe that religious toleration was the most precious fruit of civil war and its retention was to be his constant preoccupation. Directly his great power and implacable opposition to spiritual coercion had secured to England the benefits of religious toleration, the loose coalition of sects began to crumble, thereby gravely endangering the safety of the State and the permanence of religious liberty. Cromwell was shocked and then angered by the realization that sectarianism, its enemies having been rendered impotent, was in its turn exhibiting those characteristics of intolerance normally associated with a dominant religious group. At one time or another every sect in England attacked not only the political policy but the religious aims of Cromwell. It was then that the Protector with a grim determination to preserve sectarianism against its own inherent anarchism thrust England into the mould of a comprehensive religious settlement which he preserved by military power and which he contemplated buttressing by the assumption of the crown.

Cromwell's tolerance, then, was limited basically by harsh reality. English public opinion had come through tuition in the bitter school of experience to accept the theory of religious toleration but it had not yet accepted it instinctively or enthusiastically. Cromwell sought to drive public opinion faster and farther than the slow and inarticulate instincts of the mass mind could progress. He carried England into uncharted waters in both politics and religion, and public opinion, though changed perceptibly and permanently under his tutelage, relapsed with the Restoration into a period of recuperation and stock-taking in the more traditional grooves of thought and policy.

Cromwell's tolerance was further limited by the realities of political necessity. He was fully prepared to extend complete liberty of thought and worship to every Protestant communion in England. He deplored nothing in Presbyterianism save its intolerance; he feared nothing in Anglicanism save its devotion to the crown. He did insist, however, that political disorder and sedition should not mask themselves under the guise of religion. In that uncertain area where religious principles become hopelessly intertwined with opposition to the State and violence to public morality, Cromwell was inclined to act decisively to preserve sovereignty and political order. It was principally for this reason that Anglicanism was restrained after the abortive uprising of 1655, that the Levellers and Fifth Monarchy Men were repressed after it had become clear that their fantastic religious beliefs were not unmixed with grave political danger to the State, and that the Roman Catholics, though treated with amazing tolerance, were not wholly relieved of legal pains.

In the period immediately preceding the assembling of the Nominated Parliament, Cromwell had striven earnestly to unite the various sectarian groups on a religious programme which would ensure the perpetuation of spiritual freedom. He held repeated conferences with leading Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist ministers in an effort to persuade them to unite upon some tolerant principles of agreement.[1] But already the fatal division between the moderates and the fanatical sectaries was bearing its unhappy fruit. The wholly incendiary Fifth Monarchy Men were preaching to great crowds at Blackfriars,[2] demanding the immediate destruction of the existing government, which they denounced as carnal and sinful. These men, inspired by the ultimate logic of the doctrine of predestination, were also bitterly opposed to the latitudinarian philosophy of the Cromwellian regime, holding that the saints should be vested with complete power in order to cleanse the realm of sin and corruption.[1] For weeks the general withheld the hand of repression, hoping that the reckless enthusiasm of their zeal would expend itself and seeking vainly to reason with the leaders of the sect. At the same time, Independency was beginning to exhibit symptoms of intolerance which must have gravely disturbed the Government. Petitions demanding further reformation were pouring in, of which one from "the godly party . . . of Salop" is perhaps typical. The petitioners demanded the immediate suppression of wakes, morris-dancing, profane sports, adultery, and idleness, and an effective restraint of blasphemy and error.[2]

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[1] Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, II, 265.

[2] *Clarendon State Papers*, II, §1213.

Cromwell had exhibited complete and naïve faith in the sectaries who dominated the recently convened Parliament. He hoped to gain from it support and encouragement in the great ideal to which he had dedicated himself and he was inclined to surrender to it complete liberty in considering and resolving the grave problems of State and Church which had for so long perplexed England. The Parliament was filled with men of certain piety, idealistic in extreme, but without political or parliamentary experience. Clarendon's violent strictures on its membership: "the generality of them are the most unknowne in the commonwealth, peti-foggers, inne-keepers, mil-wrights, stocking-mongers, and such a rabble as never had hopes to be a grand jury,"[3] unfairly abuses a body which contained men like Monck, Lockhart, Blake, Henry Cromwell, and Cooper, but does reflect with considerable accuracy the prevailing composition of the body. The most consistent champions of religious liberty in its debates were three Baptist laymen, Colonel Henry Danvers, Major Thomas Sanders, and Samuel Highland.[1] The Baptists exerted a very strong influence on the deliberations of the Parliament, though they were by no means in agreement amongst themselves on political issues.[2]

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[1] *Vide post*, 174–176.

[2] *Several Proceedings in Parliament*, October 3, 1653. Even more intolerant was the petition from the "Congregational Churches in the Northern Counties" (*Several Proceedings in Parliament*, October 10, 1653).

[3] *Clarendon State Papers*, II, §1213 (June 3, 1653), §1221 (June 17, 1653).

The Nominated Parliament first turned its attention to the formulation of a general religious principle which would serve to guide its discussions. Somewhat earlier Cromwell had undertaken serious conversations on this matter with several leading ministers and members of Parliament. An interesting memorandum from an unnamed person had urged the general to establish peace and freedom in England "by fixing the nations interest and your own upon some solid fundamentals" in religion and politics. The correspondent urged that the sects must be restrained by the principle of toleration from their own excessive zeal, since each "drives at an establishment of their owne . . . members, their owne principles and opinions." They all seek to exclude their rivals from any share in government and to usurp a tyrannical superiority in Church and State.[3] A definitive statement of the devotion of the State to religious liberty should be agreed upon in order to secure to the nation the benefits of toleration.

Submitting to governmental pressure, Parliament on October 10, 1653, resolved "that there shall be a declaration for giving fitting liberty to all that fear God within this commonwealth, and for preventing the abuses of speaking evil against magistrates and magistracy, and the better preservation of the mutual peace of such as fear God among themselves, without imposing one upon another, and to discountenance blasphemous, damnable heresies, and licentious practices."[4] Three weeks later the House requested the Council of State to formulate this principle more precisely, taking care that the good people of the nation shall be protected in "their peaceable assemblies for the worship of God; provided that the instruction be not extended to the sufferance, protection, or countenance of popish or idolatrous rites."[1] On November 12th the Council of State issued a proclamation giving effect to the parliamentary resolution, declaring that it "will so protect all the good people of these nations; and that no disturbance may be offered to any such, in their peaceable assemblies for the worship of God."[2]

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[1] Danvers, who sat for Leicester, had in 1649 published the *Certain quaeries concerning liberty of conscience*, which argued for universal toleration, even of papists. Sanders, a justice of the peace and a member of parliament in 1654 and 1658, would have withheld all religious power from the magistrate. Highland, a member from Surrey, was likewise a justice and was again returned in 1654 and 1656.

[2] *Thurloe Papers. A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe, etc.* (ed. by Thomas Birch) (L., 1742), I, 393.

[3] *Thurloe Papers*, I, 591 ff.

[4] *C.J.*, VII, 332.

The Nominated Parliament devoted most of its attention in religious matters to a discussion of ways and means whereby some arrangement for the state maintenance of the clergy could be substituted for the tithe system.[3] Little progress was made in this tangled question, but late in the session the Committee on Tithes reported out an important recommendation for legislation to secure the ejection of "ignorant, profane, and scandalous ministers." The committee proposed to divide England into six administrative areas. Each district should be supervised by three commissioners, covering the parishes on circuit and consulting with representative persons in the several counties. These commissions should be empowered by majority vote to eject such ministers as "are not of good behaviour, and holy in conversation, or that are not apt and able to teach, or, in teaching, hold not fast the faithful word, or be not diligent, or labour not in the word and doctrine. . . ." They should likewise be empowered to settle godly ministers in vacancies, to merge weak and impoverished parishes, and to maintain a general supervision over the preaching of the Word. At the same time the committee made tentative recommendations for the appointment of the panel of eighteen parliamentary commissioners, suggesting such Independents and liberal Presbyterians as John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Marshall, Caryl, and Cradock.[4]

This proposal for the administration and discipline of the contemplated Establishment evidently stems from Owen's earlier suggestions,[5] and may be said fairly to represent the conservative Independent ecclesiastical opinion of the period, supported by that portion of Presbyterianism which was not wholly intransigent. The House began debate upon the recommendations, though it appears that no bill was drafted. The great strength of Baptist and allied sectarian opinion in the Parliament was demonstrated when on the first division the plan to vest the commissioners with the power of ejection was defeated by the narrow margin of 56–54.[1] The majority were bitterly opposed to the creation of any National Church and regarded the powers which had been proposed for the commissioners as susceptible of perversion and tyranny.

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[1] Quoted in Glass, H. A., *The Barebones Parliament, etc.* (L., 1899), 110.

[2] *At the Council of State at White-hall, etc.* (L., 1653) (s.sh.).

[3] *C.J.*, VII, 361, *et passim.*

[4] *Several Proceedings*, December 10, 1653.

[5] *Vide ante*, 140–143.

The Government had lent strong support to this proposal for establishing order in the Church, and was gravely disturbed by the rising strength of the radical sectaries in Parliament. During the months since the Nominated Parliament had convened, incendiarism and radicalism had grown apace and the conservative officers in the council had steadily urged upon Cromwell the high necessity for taking strong measures against the extremists in the interest of public order. The Fifth Monarchy Men attacked both Parliament and the council, and were openly inciting to rebellion. In July, Harrison's preaching at Blackfriars had been ordered suspended, but both he and the fanatical Feake flouted authority by continuing their vicious attacks.[2] The remarkable liberty of the period was gravely abused in a veritable contagion of fanaticism and exhibitionism.[3] The irrepressible Lilburne, who had been banished under pain of death, had returned to lead a crusade for a pure democracy. When he was acquitted by a jury amidst the acclamations of the very soldiers stationed to guard the court, Clarendon could write exultantly that the Commonwealth appeared to be dissolving. Several of the extremists, particularly Powell and Feake, were emboldened to attack Cromwell in completely scurrilous terms, and the Government was harassed by the impossibility of determining the strength of the following of these fanatics. The mystified Venetian representative reported that confusion reigned in London because of the multiplicity of sects. Cromwell was both alarmed and disgusted, and the Government was preparing to take measures designed to curb them.[4]

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[1] *C.J.*, VII, 363.

[2] *Clarendon State Papers*, II, §1246 (July 1, 1653).

[3] *Ibid.*, II, §1307 (July 29, 1653).

[4] *Thurloe Papers*, I, 621, 641 (December 2, December 22, 1653).

Lambert's conservative views had been abundantly vindicated by the headiness of Parliament and by the growing disorder in the capital. On December 12th the Nominated Parliament was dissolved, half by ruse and half by force. The Nominated Parliament had represented an effort to deliver to sectarianism legislative power in the quest for the ideal State. This experiment had failed because of the inexperience, the irreconcilable aims, and the essential confusion of the sectarian strength underlying the rule of the army. The strength of sectarianism lay in its devotion to the principle of religious toleration and that required rather administration than additional legislation for fulfilment. Power had been surrendered back to Cromwell; an effort was undertaken to place the Government upon more traditional bases, and Cromwell and his council set themselves resolutely to the task of defining and administering the Church by executive ordinance.

2. Definition of the church by ordinance, December 1653–September 1654

Lambert and his friends had prepared the *Instrument of Government* before the dissolution of the Nominated Parliament, almost certainly with the approbation of Cromwell. On December 16th, four days after Parliament had been dissolved, Cromwell was installed as Lord Protector under the new constitution. The *Instrument* provided for the election of a new Parliament which should convene on September 3, 1654, and until that time the Protector and his council were empowered to issue ordinances enjoying the force of law. The Cromwellian Church was to be defined under the powers bestowed by this provision.

The *Instrument of Government*, which was declared to be the fundamental constitution of the nation, followed the *Agreement of the People* with only slight modifications in its religious provisions. A National Church was envisaged by the clause declaring that a public profession of Christianity should prevail, but full protection and liberty were to be extended to congregations unable to accept the established worship, provided they did not abuse their liberty by causing civil injury to others or by disturbing the public peace. At the same time, the *Instrument* categorically excluded popery and prelacy from the benefits of legal toleration. The controversial subject of tithes was tenderly treated by the somewhat delphic statement that the traditional system of maintenance should be retained until a more equitable and less disputed arrangement for the support of the clergy could be devised.[1]

Before the Protectorate could pass on to the task of implementing the religious clauses of the *Instrument*, however, it had first to deal with the problem of fanatical sectarianism. The Fifth Monarchy Men and the Levellers, fed by the extremist wing of the Baptists, became even more violent and abusive with the institution of the Protectorate. Two days after Cromwell's installation, Feake, Powell, and other Fifth Monarchists attacked him with a scurrility which no modern government could brook. Several of the leaders of the sect were examined by the council, but were released after having been warned to desist from their inflammatory sermons and writings[2]. The council feared principally the spread of anarchism to the army and it was deemed necessary to remove the erratic Harrison from his command when he declined to subscribe to the *Instru-*

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[1] Five chapters of the *Instrument of Government* were concerned with the problem of religion. Chapter XXXV provided that "the Christian religion, as contained in the Scriptures, be held forth and recommended as the public profession of these nations; and that, as soon as may be, a provision, less subject to scruple and contention, and more certain than the present, be made for the encouragement and maintenance of able and painful teachers, for instructing the people, and for the discovery and confutation of error, heresy, and whatever is contrary to sound doctrine." The next chapter provided that the public profession of faith should not be forwarded by coercive means, but by "sound doctrine, and the example of a good conversation." Chapter XXXVII stipulated that "such as profess faith in God by Jesus Christ, (though differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship, or discipline publickly held forth) shall not be restrained from, but shall be protected in, the profession of the faith, and exercise of their religion; so as they abuse not this liberty to the civil injury of others, and to the actual disturbance of the public peace on their parts: provided this liberty be not extended to popery or prelacy, nor to such as, under the profession of Christ, hold forth and practise licentiousness." The final clause provided that all laws limiting liberty in religion "shall be esteemed as null and void." (*Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum* (ed. by C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait) (L., 1911), II, 821–822.)

[2] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, xlii, 59 (December 20, December 22, 1653).

ment. The cautious tactics of the council were unavailing, however, for in January the attacks upon the Protector were resumed with savage vigour. Cromwell was accused of betraying the army and of persecuting the saints, and was commonly denounced by the extremists as the antichrist and the "limb of Satan." The limits of tolerance had been persistently violated by downright sedition and on January 19th the council promulgated an ordinance declaring it treasonable to teach or publish "that the Protector and people in Parliament are not supreme, or that the administration was not in the Protector and council, or that their authority is tyrannical, usurped, or unlawful."[1] Two or three of the Fifth Monarchy leaders were soon lodged in prison for flagrant violations of the ordinance, though Cromwell consistently declined to exact the death penalty. During the summer a profound reaction of public opinion set in against the extremists, augmented by the abortive plot on the Protector's life, and even the most optimistic Royalists were obliged to admit that the number and influence of the Levellers and Fifth Monarchy Men was small and that the extremists were hated by all parties in England.[2] In late September 1654, a royalist reporter indicated that the Government had the radical groups firmly in hand. They could perhaps muster as many as five thousand "really valiant fighting men in the field," but the veteran army remained devoted to the Government.[3] The tolerance and patience of few governments have ever been as sorely tested, and certainly few governments have ever shown greater restraint and tenderness in the handling of fanatical and seditious abuse. Cromwell's devotion to the principle of religious liberty had been tested and proved under conditions of great stress. The Government was now free to turn its attention to the problem of preserving freedom of conscience while organizing the religious life of England in a State Church which should include as many of the fragments of a now shattered Protestantism as judicious compromise and charitable latitude would permit.

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[1] Quoted by Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, II, 303, n.4.

[2] *Clarendon State Papers*, II, §2020 (September 4, 1654). It should be noted that royalist despatches consistently referred to the Fifth Monarchy party as Anabaptists. The bulk of the sect was undoubtedly drawn from the ranks of the Baptists, but the two groups were distinct. It should be indicated, however, that Fifth Monarchy opinions, especially concerning the imminent coming of Christ, were deeply rooted in all the sects of the period.

[3] *Ibid.*, II, §2021 (September 25, 1654).

The conception of such a Church was rapidly evolving in the Protector's mind. The principle of religious toleration and latitude had so firmly rooted itself in his thinking that a Venetian correspondent declared it was dominating even his foreign policy.[1] The Dutch embassy reported that the Protector had resolved to establish in England a National Church based upon the organization of the French Huguenots. But outside this Church he had determined to grant freedom to "those that are of other professions, as Anabaptists, Brownists, Independents." Indeed, it was widely believed that Cromwell was prepared to permit the Catholics freedom of private worship, at least until Parliament should convene.[2] In accordance with this resolution the Protector summoned a conference of representative Independents, Baptists, Presbyterians, and even Anglicans to assemble at Whitehall in an effort to find a basis for common union and agreement. It was proposed to bring these Protestant groups, which included practically all of the religious life of England, into his State Church if "they shall not dispute one another's *principia*, but labour to agree in union."[3] The Anglican, Dr. Gauden, writing two years later, indicated that there was for a time a reasonable chance of a common understanding upon the fundamentals of Christianity.[4] But any possibility of forming a really National Church was dissipated by the disclosure of a formidable royalist plot and by the too rigid views of the sects.

Shortly after these conversations had been adjourned the Protector issued a proclamation, calling England to a day of fasting and humiliation, in which he expanded more precisely his religious objectives. The nation, he declared, has not displayed sufficient gratitude for its delivery from spiritual tyranny. All parties have avowed their support of the principle of freedom of worship, but they have not been as zealous "to communicate it one to another." The healing spirit of brotherly love is not as apparent as it should be. "Do we not more contend for saints having rule in the world, than over their own hearts?" Christians are not conducting themselves with charity and forbearance. "Do not some of us affirm ourselves to be the only true ministry, and true churches of Christ, and only to have the ordinances in purity, excluding our brethren, though of equal gifts, and having as large a seal of their ministry, and desiring with as much fervour and zeal to enjoy the ordinances in their utmost purity?"[1] This remarkable message summoned England to dedicate itself to the advancement of tolerance and charity. Cromwell envisaged the formation of a loosely federated State Church which would promote righteousness under the protection and encouragement of the Government. He deplored narrow partisanship, too zealous bigotry, and too rigid dogmatism as inimical to the attainment of that ideal. He desired no more than a general agreement upon the fundamental principles of doctrine, insisted only that the complexion of the Church should be soundly Protestant, and scorned even to concern himself with the protection of this Church by a system of discipline.

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[1] *V.P.*, February 7, 1655, xxx, 17–18. There was no Venetian envoy resident in London after 1652. The material in the *Venetian Papers* for the period of the Protectorate is based upon news despatches from London and comments from other embassies.

[2] *Nicholas to Hyde, Nicholas Papers. Correspondence of Sir Edward Nicholas* (ed. by Sir G. F. Warner) (L., 1886–1920), II, 63–64 (April 2, 1654).

[3] *Thurloe Papers*, II, 67 (February 3/13, 1654).

[4] *Ibid.*, IV, 598–601.

On March 20, 1654, the first of a series of ecclesiastical ordinances appeared.[2] This enactment undertook to establish administrative machinery for the selection of the ministry for the State Church. Nothing was said concerning the dissenting and voluntary churches which were to surround the Establishment. These churches, it was assumed, were protected under the terms of the fundamental constitution and should solve their administrative problems in their own way. The ordinance named thirty-eight persons as commissioners invested with the power and responsibility of passing upon the qualifications of persons presented for benefices. The commission represented Independent, Presbyterian, Baptist, and lay opinion.[1] It was empowered to pass rather upon the fitness of a candidate for service in the Establishment than upon his qualifications for ordination. In this respect it was considerably more tolerant than Owen's earlier scheme upon which it was based. Five commissioners constituted a quorum capable of approving a candidate, while the presence of nine or more was required in the case of a rejection. Each candidate must provide the commission with testimonials from at least three persons "of known godliness and integrity," of whom one must be a minister who could speak from personal knowledge of the "holy and good conversation" of the applicant.[2] The work of the committee was centralized in Westminster, arrangements having been made for examining the credentials of distant candidates. The rights of patrons were preserved, save that it was not possible for a patron to bestow a benefice upon a person deemed unfit by the commission.

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[1] *A declaration of his highness the Lord Protector, inviting the people of England and Wales, to a day of solemn fasting and humiliation* (L., March 20, 1654) (s.sh.).

[2] *Mercurius Politicus*, March 21, March 23, 1654.

Within a month after its establishment the commission announced, in an open letter to the clergy of England and Wales, that it was prepared to examine the qualifications of applicants. Ministers desiring to recommend candidates were carefully warned to limit their certifications to persons about whom they possessed intimate knowledge. They were further reminded that it was difficult to discover the state of a man's grace and gifts in a short time. The commission, it was carefully indicated, included members of different judgments in church matters, and would strive to conduct its examinations with impartiality and great care.[1]

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[1] The members were:

Francis Rous
Thomas Goodwin
John Owen
John Arrowsmith
Thankful Owen
Anthony Tuckney
Thomas Horton
Joseph Caryl
Philip Nye
William Carter
Sidrach Simpson
William Greenhill
William Strong
Thomas Manton
Samuel Slater
William Cooper
Stephen Marshall
John Tombes
Walter Cradock
Samuel Faircloth
Hugh Peters
Peter Sterry
Samuel Bamford
Thomas Valentine
Henry Jessey
Obadiah Sedgwick
Nicholas Lockyer
Daniel Dyke
James Russell
Nathaniel Campfield
Robert Titchborn (London alderman)
Mark Hildesley
Thomas Wood
John Sadler
William Goff
Thomas St. Nicholas
William Packer
Edward Cresset

Of this number 12 may be identified as Presbyterians, 10 as Independents, and 6 as Baptists. (Firth and Rait, *Acts and Ordinances*, II, 856.)

[2] Scobell, *Acts and Ordinances*, II, 280.

That the commission succeeded notably in adhering to the high and tolerant ideal to which it had addressed itself is attested by no less severe a critic of the Protectorate than Baxter. He wrote that though the triers were principally Independents, and "though some few [were] over-busie and over-rigid . . . against all that were Arminians, and too particular in enquiring after evidences of sanctification in those whom they examined, and somewhat too lax in their admission of unlearned and erroneous men, that favoured Antinomianism and Anabaptism; yet to give them their due, they did abundance of good to the Church . . . so that though there were many of them somewhat partial . . . yet so great was the benefit above the hurt, which they brought to the Church, that many thousands of souls blest God for the faithful ministers whom they let in, and grieved when the prelatists afterward cast them out again."[2]

A second ordinance, published on August 28, 1654, completed the administrative structure of the Cromwellian Church by providing for the supervision of the clergy through the expulsion of unfit ministers. The ordinance followed Owen's earlier recommendation with insignificant changes. A commission was nominated in the text of the ordinance, composed of members drawn from the several counties, with power to call before it "any preacher, lecturer, and schoolmaster who are ignorant, scandalous, insufficient, or negligent in their several and respective places." The ordinance defined "scandalous" as the retention of opinions punishable under the terms of the blasphemy act, "or prophane cursing or swearing, perjury . . . popish opinions . . . adultery, fornication, drunkenness, common haunting of taverns or ale houses, frequent quarreling or fighting, frequent playing at cards or dice, prophaning of the Sabbath Day." These disciplinary restrictions would certainly have enjoyed the general support of the stern Christian conscience of England. Unfortunately, however, the ordinance displayed purely sectarian bias when it likewise defined as scandalous conduct the frequent use of the Book of Common Prayer in religious service since January 1, 1653, the reviling of the strict profession of religion, and the practice or encouragement of the harmless, if superstitious, "ales, wakes, morris-dances, [and] may-poles" which for so many centuries had enlivened rural life in England.[1]

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[1] *Mercurius Politicus*, April 13, 1654; *Weekly Intelligencer*, April 20, 1654.

[2] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 72. Baxter adds that, despite his outspoken criticism of the Cromwellian regime, he was never molested "farther than by the tongue, nor was I ever by any of them in those times forbidden or hindered to preach one sermon, except only one Assize-sermon." (*Ibid.*, I, 67, *et cf.* I, 71.)

The county commissioners were to meet with clerical assistants, also named by the act, in order to assess the conduct and fitness of the ministry by the criteria laid down by the ordinance. The commission was instructed to concern itself solely with matters of clerical capacity and propriety, being expressly barred from an inquisition into the orthodoxy of the clergy. It was empowered, upon the oaths of two credible witnesses or upon the testimony of one witness if concurrent evidence supported the affidavit, to eject guilty ministers from their charges. If an ejected minister resigned his benefice without resistance, the commission was authorized to set aside one fifth of the revenues of the parish for the maintenance of the ejected clergyman and his family.[2]

The Protector had attempted to found a State Church which would retain some consistency of organization while weighing upon the conscience of no Christian man. In this Establishment no agreement on ritual or doctrine was required, save the acceptance of the main principles of Christianity. "It was not so much a Church as a confederation of Christian sects working together for righteousness, under the control of the State."[3] By definition it sought to merge the principles of comprehension and religious toleration. The ecclesiastical opinions of the ministry were to be regarded as indifferent, and no particular pains were taken to secure a cohesive organization or discipline. Nothing was defined rigidly or exclusively. Each congregation and each minister was left substantially free of any superior control. "The whole thing was not so much a settling of the problem [of] what shall the national church be, as a pretending that the problem did not exist."[1] No discipline was imposed by the State, each parish being left free to consult its own moral conscience. Outside this loosely and tolerantly conceived Establishment the dissenting sects were extended freedom to worship under state protection so long as their views and conduct did not violate the dignity and sovereignty of the State. On this ground Anglicanism was denied a place within the framework of the Church and was technically excluded from sectarian status. The Protectorate could argue in defence of this policy that Anglicanism was quite as much a political as an ecclesiastical party, but this was to ignore the fact that the most numerous and substantial elements in the religious life of England had been excluded from the category of Christian communions. As we shall later observe, this legal exclusion was very considerably mitigated by the administrative clemency and tolerance of the Protector, but this could not conceal the fact that a rare opportunity for the foundation of a completely tolerant religious system had been lost because of the fear bred and constantly fed by royalist intrigue.

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[1] Scobell, *Acts and Ordinances*, II, 340.

[2] *Ibid.*, II, 343–344; *Weekly Intelligencer*, August 24, 1654; *Mercurius Politicus*, §221 (September 4, 1654); *Perfect Account of the Daily Intelligence*, September 6, 1654.

[3] Firth, C. H., *Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Puritans in England* (N.Y., 1900), 368.

3. The great debate on the limits of toleration, September 1654–January 1655

The legal definition of the Church which was being framed under the authority vested in the Protector and the council was completed in anticipation of the meeting of the first parliament of the Protectorate on September 3, 1654. The elections had been governed by the constitutional provisions of the *Instrument* and as the returns began to come in during July the Government became apprehensive about what attitude the members would assume towards the ecclesiastical settlement and, what was more important, towards the fundamental religious guarantees of the *Instrument*. A few royalists had been returned from the West, while the religious complexion of the body as a whole was moderately Presbyterian or Puritan.[1] The Government accordingly prepared to take an immovable position upon the *Instrument* under whose provisions Parliament had been convened, and, assisted by the sectarian strength in Parliament, to defend step by step the inevitable assaults which would be made upon the fabric of religious toleration.

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[1] Clark, *English Nonconformity*, I, 378.

This resolution was ably and precisely expressed in the Lord Protector's speech opening the session on September 4th. He argued the view that the dominant opinion in England was dedicated to the defence and retention of religious liberty. The perpetuity of such liberty can be secured only by the legal withdrawal of the civil ruler from the province of religion. Still, this "glorious thing" may well be perverted and interpreted in such wise as to endanger the peace and safety of the nation. When expression of opinion is wholly unrestrained it is likely to swing from one violent extreme to another, thereby doing injury to the very liberty of conscience which permits it to exist. Thus the Fifth Monarchy Men have by their extremism demonstrated the great danger inherent in uncontrolled liberty, "and if the magistrate, by punishing visible miscarriages, save them by that discipline, God having ordained him for that end,—I hope it will evidence love and not hatred. . . ." The civil law, however, should concern itself only with overt breaches of peace and liberty. It deals with facts and not with opinions and consequently leaves men free to believe as they choose. The magistrate must move to restrain such men only when they attempt to set illegal and anti-social views into practice to the consequent danger and harm of the State.[2]

Cromwell had learned by the failure of the Nominated Parliament that godly enthusiasm and idealism were not a sufficient basis for orderly and careful government. His opening speech and subsequent policy indicate clearly that he hoped to win the support of moderate Presbyterianism and, by reconciling this body of opinion in Parliament, to heal the wounds which had been inflicted during the long and bitter controversy between sectarianism and extreme Presbyterianism. Hazlerigg, long an Independent and a supporter of religious toleration, sought on September 5th to amplify further the basis for such a reconciliation by proposing that unity in religion should be the prime concern of the members in their deliberations. Moderate Presbyterianism stemmed directly from the great body of Puritan thought, and it was evident that if it could be absorbed into the Church of the Protectorate a stable and almost impregnable Protestantism would result.

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[1] *V.P.*, July 17, 1654, xxix, 236, 241; *Clarendon State Papers*, II, §2020 (September 4, 1654); *et vide* Gardiner's full analysis of the returns, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, III, 12–14.

[2] Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, II, 345–349.

The debates of this Parliament were almost exclusively concerned with the *Instrument of Government*, and upon no other consideration were the deliberations so protracted or so important as those dealing with the religious clauses. The House quickly showed its dissatisfaction with the essentially lay attitude which the council had exhibited in framing the religious ordinances. A resolution was carried which called for the creation of a consultative assembly of divines. The restraining hand of Parliament was not to be relaxed, however, since it was stipulated that the members from each county were to appoint a godly and able minister to the proposed assembly.[1] A violent debate followed in which both the religious and political clauses of the *Instrument* were assailed by the conservative Presbyterian leadership.[2] In particular, it was pointed out that the article, stipulating that "such as profess faith in God by Jesus Christ" should be protected in the exercise of their faith, required parliamentary interpretation. The clause could be safely administered only after Parliament had defined the fundamentals of Christian faith and had set the outer limits of permissible dissent from the Established Church.

Had Parliament succeeded in grasping to itself this power of definition and interpretation the administrative tolerance of the Protector would have been quickly destroyed by legal restriction. Cromwell sensed the extreme danger to his policy inherent in the drift of the parliamentary debate, and, suddenly appearing in the House, told the members bluntly that "some things are fundamentals . . . they may not be parted with; but will, I trust, be delivered over to posterity, as being the fruits of our blood and travail."[1] The Civil Wars had secured to England certain fundamental prerogatives which Parliament could not entrench upon, and chief amongst them was the inviolability of conscience. These fundamentals were clearly incorporated in the *Instrument of Government* and each member of Parliament was required as a condition of membership to give a solemn recognition of this fact and to pledge himself not to attempt their alteration.[2]

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[1] *C.J.*, VII, 367.

[2] Burton, Thomas, *Diary of Thomas Burton, Esq., Member in the Parliaments of Oliver and Richard Cromwell, from* 1656 *to* 1659 . . . *With* . . . *an account of the Parliament of* 1654; *from the Journal of Guibon Goddard, etc.* (L., 1828), I, xxix–xxxiii.

Almost a month passed before the House undertook its consideration of the all-important and delicate "fundamental" of religious liberty. In preparation for its discussion, Parliament on October 5th determined to abandon its initial plan for the convention of an assembly of divines, substituting instead a standing parliamentary committee to recommend "twelve or twenty . . . ministers to be sent for, to advise of such matters of religion, as should be propounded to them from the House."[3] Three weeks later (October 26th) the Parliament voted as a guiding principle in its discussion of religion the conservatively phrased resolution that "the true Christian religion contained in the Scripture, be held forth and recommended as the public profession of these nations, and that the present maintenance of ministers shall not be taken away nor impeached, until some provision, less subject to scruple and contention, be made for them."[4] It was soon evident that no agreement could be reached by the entire House on the question of the religious fundamental, and a sub-committee was accordingly appointed with instructions to bring in articles defining more exactly the limits of toleration.[5] The committee reported pessimistically during the next week that it had been quite unable to frame precise recommendations, and the whole question was consequently reopened on the floor in a long debate which soon made it apparent that the issues involved were "generally apprehended more difficult than anything that had been formerly propounded."[6] The limits of Cromwell's patience, since he had maintained a sinister silence during the rather cautious sniping by Parliament on the principle of toleration, were not generally known to the members, who had good cause to fear that the Protector's wrath might terminate even the debate on imposing limits upon freedom of belief. The House accordingly resolved to appoint a committee of ten to confer with the Protector on the "stating the point of the articles of liberty of conscience," having previously advised with such ministers as it chose to call into consultation.[1]

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[1] Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, II, 381 (September 12, 1654).

[2] Burton, *Diary*, I, xxxv.

[3] *Ibid.*, I, xlvi.

[4] *Ibid.*, I, lix.

[5] *Mercurius Politicus*, November 1, 1654.

[6] Burton, *Diary*, I, lx.

The parliamentary committee entrusted to a sub-committee of fourteen divines the task of drawing up the fundamental doctrines of Christian faith which should prescribe the limits of the permissible toleration of sects outside the Establishment. The committee, which was headed by John Owen, was dominated by moderate Presbyterians and conservative Independent thinkers.[2] Lord Broghill had nominated the liberal Anglican primate Ussher, but he had declined to serve because of the infirmities of age and "an unwillingness to wrangle." The baron then nominated Baxter, who, arriving after the discussions had begun, quickly assumed the leadership of the liberal group in the committee.[3] Baxter immediately proposed to limit the fundamentals to the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Decalogue—foundations of faith upon which Christianity rested and upon which all Christian communions were in agreement. Owen and the conservative majority apprehensively pointed out that this definition would clearly include the Romanists and Socinians within the limits of toleration. The unshaken Baxter, supported by Vines, replied that no formula could possibly be devised which would exclude heresy since men would inevitably interpret such articles of faith according to their own judgment and not by the prescriptive judgment of the framers.[4] But even this extremely advanced position did not satisfy the tolerant demands of the Lord Protector, who summoned Baxter before him to smother him with a torrent of words.[5] Cromwell was very indignant at the intolerant temper which Parliament was displaying, which he declared was supported by men who not many years before had pleaded for a complete liberty of conscience. He disburdened his outraged feelings to the parliamentary committee, upbraiding the House for its zeal in taking the Government to pieces article by article. Nor was he disposed even to consult with the committee on the question of imposing restrictions upon liberty of conscience.[1]

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[1] *Mercurius Politicus*, November 4, 1654.

[2] Owen, Goodwin, Nye, Simpson, Cheynell, Baxter, Marshall, and Vines were the principal members.

[3] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, II, 197.

[4] Calamy, Edmund, *An abridgement of Mr. Baxter's History of his life and times, etc.* (L., 1713), I, 121.

[5] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, II 205.

Baxter, meanwhile, had been defeated by the "over-orthodox Doctors Owen and Cheynell" in the committee of divines. In early December the majority carried a resolution defining in sixteen articles[2] the fundamentals of Christian faith. The articles, following closely Owen's earlier list, proclaimed as fundamental and necessary to salvation belief in the Bible as the Word of God, in the existence and omnipotence of God, in the orthodox teaching concerning the trinity and the divinity of Christ, in Christ as the redeemer of mankind through His sacrifice, in the sinful nature of man, in the judgment of the dead, and in the expectation of everlasting life.[3]

But developments on the floor of Parliament in the meantime were to prevent the serious consideration of the report on the fundamentals of faith, which was handed in on December 12th. Some days earlier the House had resolved that "the true Christian religion, as it is contained in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, shall be held forth, and recommended, and no other, as the publick profession of these nations."[4] As Gardiner has pointed out, the wording of the resolution was far more rigid than the toleration clause of the *Instrument*,[5] but Parliament had shown a singular inability either to define or to implement the restrictions which it desired to impose upon religious toleration. Thwarting the conservative and somewhat intolerant instinct of Parliament was the resolute tolerance of the Lord Protector. The House, on December 8th, sought to test that resolution by a far from lucid proposal that no laws should be made "to compel any person or persons to conform to the doctrine, worship, and discipline publicly professed" without the express consent of the Protector and Parliament.[1] As a *quid pro quo*, Cromwell was asked to agree that such enactments as might be passed governing the state clergy and requiring religious worship were to become law after twenty days, the Protector's veto notwithstanding.[2] An even more serious attempt to curtail administrative tolerance followed when it was moved to bring exclusively within parliamentary jurisdiction the restraint of "atheism, blasphemy, damnable heresies, popery, prelacy, licentiousness, and profaneness, or such as shall preach, print, or publish anything, contrary to the publick profession held forth, or shall do any overt or publick act to the disturbance thereof."[3]

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, lxxix.

[2] Baxter indicated that twenty articles were agreed upon, but only sixteen were finally presented to Parliament.

[3] *C.J.*, VII, 399.

[4] *Ibid.*, VII, 397.

[5] Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, III, 61.

These votes can be regarded as nothing less than a frontal attack upon the liberal religious policy of the Government and were clearly designed to restore to Parliament complete jurisdiction over the definition and restraint of heresy. The crux of the controversy lay in Parliament's demand for exclusive control over "damnable heresies" and the Government forced a division on a proposal designed explicitly to strip Parliament of authority in this important area. After a day of bitter and exhausting debate the Government's demand was defeated by a vote of 79–62.[4] The issue was joined again on December 11th, "after the candles were brought in," when the Government prevailed by the narrow majority of 85–84 on a motion obliging Parliament to enumerate the "damnable heresies" which it proposed to restrain.[5]

The Government's strategy in forcing Parliament to define with precision its orthodox apprehensions respecting heresy was well timed and Machiavellian in its intent. An earlier attempt on the part of Parliament to define the body of intolerable heresies had demonstrated that agreement amongst the members was impossible, that any discussion of particulars would lead to hopeless confusion and division, and that Parliament would recoil from the risk of offending powerful minorities through definite proscription. Cromwell believed with reason that Parliament could never amend religious toleration with a bill of particulars, and that, if it did so, the result would be a mildly conceived compromise written into the body of *Instrument* and consequently immune from further tightening by the legislature.

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[1] *Perfect Account*, §205; *Mercurius Politicus*, §235; Burton, *Diary*, I, cxii.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, cxiii.

[3] *C.J.*, VII, 398.

[4] Burton, *Diary*, I, cxiii; *C.J.*, VII, 399; *Mercurius Politicus*, §235.

[5] *C.J.*, VII, 399.

On December 12th Parliament delegated to a committee of sixty-two members the difficult task of enumerating the "damnable heresies" over which it had claimed control.[1] At the same time, when it rejected the proposals of Owen's committee, it inferentially admitted the practical impossibility of framing precisely the fundamentals of faith.[2] The clerics were warmly thanked for their efforts, but were instructed to confine their attention, for the time being at least, to the requirements to be imposed upon the state clergy rather than upon the doctrinal views of the congregations. While the Great Committee was grappling nervously with its assignment of defining "damnable heresies" the House took up debate on the other spiritual offences which it desired to retain within its control. As the members attempted to give explicit meaning to "atheism, blasphemy, and profaneness," it was discovered that, while they were generally disposed to legislate against such offences in the abstract, they were by no means in agreement concerning their exact content. The memory of spiritual coercion was still fresh and Parliament was not disposed to arouse the fierce wrath of sectarianism by exposing dissent to the possibility of renewed repression.[3] Parliament was evidently searching desperately for some formula which would outlaw Socinianism, the Fifth Monarchy, the Levellers, and lesser sects which were not rooted in the main stream of the Christian tradition, but was discovering that any attempt to legislate against them might with the passage of time be quite as effectively employed against more orthodox sectarianism.

Parliament's rather timid and exploratory voyages into these tempestuous waters were watched apprehensively by the Lord Protector, the army, and the sects. Cromwell had repeatedly expressed his personal displeasure and had embarrassed the House by forcing it to bring forward a bill of particulars. He found warm and timely support in a strongly worded petition from the officers demanding the protection of liberty of conscience, the abolition of tithes, and the indemnification of persons who had been wronged by persecution.[1] A short time later the Baptists of the northern counties declared their firm devotion to "that excellent instrument the saints civill Magna Charta, for the government of this Commonwealth, wherein such blessed provision is made for the tender lambs of the Lord Jesus, seconded by the late affectionate fatherly breathings of your Highnesse, at the dissolution of the last parliament."[2]

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[1] Amongst the members were Henry Cromwell, Strickland, Birch, Glynne, Goffe, Whitelocke, Cooper, Widdrington, Dacres, Lambert, Nathaniel Bacon, Francis Bacon, Vane, and John Goodwin.

[2] *C.J.*, VII, 399.

[3] Burton, *Diary*, I, cxiv.

The harassed committee on "damnable heresies" was unable to bring in a report, and Parliament was becoming aware of powerful and widespread opposition to its conservative amendments to Cromwell's ecclesiastical settlement. In order to awaken England to the ugly menace of dangerous heresy, a leading Socinian, John Biddle, was repeatedly examined by the House in a metaphysical duel in which the Unitarian emerged quite unscathed. Biddle was remanded to the Gatehouse until further proceedings could be taken,[3] while Parliament returned to a completely erratic consideration of the religious problem.

For a second time, on December 15th, Parliament fortified its zeal by voting to enumerate the list of damnable heresies, with which a committee comprising fully one-third of its members was already struggling.[4] It was likewise determined to set the bounds of doctrinal dissent by certain fundamentals to be agreed on jointly by the Lord Protector and Parliament. Later in the day copies of Owen's fundamentals were circulated amongst the members,[5] and a "snap motion" to approve the list, which Parliament had rejected only a few days previously, was barely defeated.[6] The committee was still unable to agree and Parliament realized that it was very likely to be made ridiculous by insisting stubbornly on the right to legislate against damnable heresies which it could not define. The Presbyterian leaders tried desperately on January 3, 1655, to release the House from the vise-like grip of Cromwell when by a vote of 81–75 they lost a motion denying the necessity of enumerating intolerable heresies.[1] Parliament had now to confess its ignominious defeat upon this point which for some weeks had engaged the close attention of the nation. The committee was quite unable to draft a report, and on January 12th the House conceded to Cromwell the veto power over legislation designed to curb and extirpate heresies.[2]

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[1] *Clarke Papers*, III, 13.

[2] Nickolls, John, *Original Letters and Papers of State . . . concerning the Affairs of Great Britain, etc.* (L., 1743), 134.

[3] *Vide post*, 203–208, for a consideration of Biddle's thought and the later developments in his case.

[4] Burton, *Diary*, I, cxviii.

[5] *Mercurius Politicus*, §236; *Perfect Account*, §207.

[6] Burton, *Diary*, I, cxix. The same motion was introduced on January 3, 1655. (*Mercurius Politicus*, §238.)

An irreconcilable difference in point of view concerning liberty of conscience between the Protector and Parliament had been demonstrated during the consideration of the religious clauses of the *Instrument*. Cromwell was determined to rear in England a tolerantly and comprehensively conceived State Church, protecting sober sectarianism by legal guarantees, while repressing seditious and anti-social dissent by administrative and civil measures. The moderate Presbyterians and conservative Independents, representing the main body of Puritan opinion, desired a State Church whose doctrines should be more precisely defined and whose discipline should afford more protection to purity of doctrine. Puritan opinion, distrusting the leniency of the Protector, wanted at the same time to ensure England against further religious disintegration by proscribing the strange heresies which had spread with incredible rapidity during the troubled years just passed. But Cromwell had stood his ground and when pressed the legislative had neither dared nor been able to reduce its abstract orthodoxy to a definite formula.

Shortly afterwards (January 22nd) Cromwell dissolved Parliament. In his speech the Lord Protector took occasion to chide Parliament for its confused conception of the English religious problem. It had, indeed, neglected a golden opportunity to settle religion on a basis of peace and unity with "a just liberty to godly men of different judgments." The members had wrangled over the fundamentals of faith when it was clear to Cromwell that all men who seek salvation "by faith in the blood of Christ," who profess the fear of God, and who have "recourse to the name of God as to a strong tower" have achieved a sufficient basis of unity. There are those who are not content unless they can "put their finger upon their brethren's consciences." The Civil War was fought in order to secure men's consciences from the ravages of religious tyranny, and the fruits of that victory cannot be sacrificed. He protested bitterly against those who, when persecuted, maintained so valiantly for liberty of conscience and who now sought to impose their judgments upon others. "Is it ingenuous to ask liberty, and not to give it? What greater hypocrisy than for those who were oppressed by the bishops to become the greatest oppressors themselves, as soon as their yoke was removed? I could wish that they who call for liberty now also had not too much of that spirit, if the power were in their hands."[1]

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[1] *C.J.*, VII, 412.

[2] *Ibid.*, VII, 414.

C. The Trial of Religious Toleration by Administrative Policy, 1655–1658

1. Further clarification of the government's policy

During the period of almost twenty months intervening between the first and second Parliaments of the Protectorate, Cromwell sought by a policy of administrative tolerance to school England in the lessons of religious liberty. The task which he faced was almost insuperable. His Government and his Church were assailed from the left by fanatical sects whose teachings and conduct outraged respectable and responsible opinion. At the same time he was engaged by the almost insoluble problem of accommodating Anglicanism and Romanism within the frame of toleration while guarding the State against the political aims to which men of these communions were devoted. Certainly, it may be said, no modern ruler has ever accomplished so much for the cause of religious liberty in the face of such gigantic difficulties.

Cromwell maintained during the confusion and perplexities of the period a calm, patient, and consistent devotion to the principles of religious freedom. It had become gradually apparent that the Christian unity of which the orthodox still prated had been dissolved by the corrosive of sectarianism into innumerable and irreconcilable fragments. The Venetian Sagredo, writing in October 1655, bore eloquent testimony to the predominance of sectarianism in England. Englishmen, he declared, were "divided into as many faiths as there are heads, and the number of religions equals the number of men."[1] Sagredo cited as an instance of this amazing religious diversity the family of a leading peer who was his next-door neighbour. The lord had six sons, all members of different sects, who were "constantly disputing and lived in perpetual brawls . . . so that their father spent all his time in separating them and restoring peace."[2] This feverish spiritual individualism was typical of the nation at large. The Government displayed remarkable tolerance in permitting attacks even upon itself, provided no overt sedition was implicit in the strictures. Cromwell gained strength from his very objectivity and from his transparent resolution to permit unrestrained religious enquiry so long as the bounds of civil peace were not transgressed. He was identified with no creed or sect and it "suits his policy that 246 religions should be professed in London . . . differing greatly from each other and incompatible. This division into so many sects makes them all weak, so that no one is strong enough to cause him apprehension."[3] The Government of the Lord Protector grew in solidity and prestige as England came to realize that the policy of religious toleration had alone prevented the outbreak of an internecine struggle of bigoted and zealous sects for religious supremacy.

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[1] Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, II, 416–417.

Shortly after the dissolution of Parliament the Lord Protector sought to state clearly and exactly the principles which would govern the administration of the religious problem. In a proclamation dated February 15, 1655, he held it to be axiomatic that God's crowning mercy to England had been the attainment of religious freedom. By this the Government understood the "free and uninterrupted passage of the Gospel running through the midst of us, and liberty for all to hold forth and profess with sobriety, their light and knowledge therein, according as the Lord in His rich grace and wisdom hath dispenced to every man." The State is resolved to protect men not only in their freedom of belief but also in freedom of worship and assembly "without any interruption from the powers God hath set over this Commonwealth," and the State considers it a positive obligation "to preserve and continue this freedom and liberty to all persons in this Commonwealth fearing God, though of differing judgments, by protecting them in the sober and quiet exercise and profession of religion, and the sincere worship of God, against all such who shall, by imposing upon the consciences of their brethren, or offering violence to their persons . . . seek to hinder them therein." Every man must have complete freedom of worship. The Government accordingly cannot countenance the intolerant and unchristian practices of diverse men "lately risen up under the names of Quakers, Ranters, and others" who vilify and interrupt religious services and undermine that religious freedom which the Christian State must labour to preserve.[1]

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[1] *V.P.*, October 1, 1655, xxx, 115.

[2] *Ibid.*, xxx, 308.

[3] *Ibid.*, xxx, 307.

Cromwell maintained with the strictest fidelity the noble principles which he had publicly announced. Freedom of belief and of worship buttressed by the authority of the State was promised to all Christian men who should worship with dignity and sobriety. Cromwell had insisted that the Government should guarantee "freedom for all judgments" in the belief that there were godly men in every sect.[2] Only those who seek imperiously to deny to other men the benefits of religious liberty will be restrained by the State. Religious tolerance and civil order were conceived as fundamentals which men could neither impugn nor endanger. So long as the abuse of the fanatics was sporadic, isolated, or personal Cromwell dismissed it contemptuously.[3] It was only when the Government detected a concerted sectarian assault upon religious liberty or the civil State that the mailed fist was lifted.

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[1] *A proclamation prohibiting the disturbing of ministers and other Christians in their assemblies and meetings* (L., 1654–1655) (s.sh.).

[2] *Robinson to Williamson, S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, cxxx, 31 (September 18, 1656).

[3] The radical and influential Richard Overton records an interesting incident in this connection. He was accused, apparently unjustly, of the authorship of the scurrilous *Character of a Protector*. Overton wrote that Cromwell

During the years 1655 to 1657 the fruits of Cromwell's trial of toleration began to appear. Contrary to the gloomy predictions of the orthodox, England was not engulfed in heresy nor was piety destroyed. Fanaticism was rapidly burning itself out and the larger and more conservative religious communions were arriving at their maturity. Toleration had enjoyed a period of trial in England which was profoundly to affect the development of religious policy after the Restoration. No less severe a critic of Cromwell than Richard Baxter bore testimony to the great benefits of the toleration which the Protector had imposed, almost by force, upon the nation. Cromwell, he wrote, gave liberty to all sects and permitted to the gospel free play upon the minds of all men. No judicious man could charge that heresy and schism were in the end advanced by this liberty. Cromwell's administrative tolerance proved beyond the shadow of doubt that religious freedom offers no terror to the godly. "I think that land most happy," Baxter concluded, "whose rulers use their authority for Christ, as well as for the civil peace; yet in comparison of the rest of the world, I shall think that land happy that hath but bare liberty to be as good as they are willing to be; and if countenance and maintenance be but added to liberty, and tollerated errors and sects be but forced to keep the peace . . . I shall not hereafter much fear such toleration, nor despair that truth will bear down adversaries."[1] No other age, he was to write later, ever possessed such complete freedom to hear the gospel preached and to labour for the advancement of truth as England had enjoyed under the firm but tolerant administration of Oliver Cromwell.

We have observed that Cromwell had dedicated himself to the maintenance of religious liberty for those Christians who did not violate the worship of others or threaten public peace and order. We shall now examine in some detail the policy of the Protectorate towards several groups which were regarded as

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had read the verses "and I believe laughed at them, as (to my knowledge) heretofore he hath done at papers and pamphlets of more personal and particular import or abuse." (*Thurloe Papers*, III, 111.)

[1] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 87.

lying wholly or partially outside the limits of toleration. The fanatical sectaries, of whom the Fifth Monarchy Men, the Ranters, and the Quakers were most important, were from time to time repressed because they endangered the civil peace and outraged the contemporary sense of propriety and decorum. The Romanists presented a more complex problem. Generations of hatred and fear of the Catholics had by 1640 become crystallized in Puritanism, and this distrust had been deeply intensified by the fervent royalism of the Catholics during the Civil War. Sectarianism regarded the Catholics as idolatrous in religion and treasonable in politics, and when these facts are borne in mind the Protector's consistent leniency towards the Romanists must be regarded as the most noteworthy aspect of his religious policy. The Anglicans were restrained by Cromwell only in so far as the requirements of sovereignty seemed to dictate. There is abundant evidence that the Lord Protector was prepared and anxious to grant freedom of worship to the Anglicans directly the historic Church divested itself of its resolution to restore the monarchy and renounced its own exclusive pretensions. Two other groups, the Socinians and the Jews, were anti-Christian and therefore were by definition without the limits of legal toleration.

2. Cromwell and the protestant incendiaries, 1655–1657

The radical sectaries raised problems which really involved civil order rather than religious liberty. There is no evidence that the Government at any time undertook the repression of these groups because of the eccentric religious beliefs which they happened to profess. It was rather that they were violently revolutionary in temper and in the name of religion waged on the Protectorate a constant war whose ferocity compensated in some measure for the extremely limited public following of these groups.

We have noticed that in 1653 the Government had found it necessary to discipline the leading Fifth Monarchy incendiaries.[1] In December of that year one of their number, Simpson, who had escaped from prison, appeared again in London where he assailed the triers as anti-Christian and popish.[1] Cromwell spent an entire day with Simpson, pleading with him not to break the peace and releasing him with an admonition to follow a more moderate course.[2] Meanwhile Feake and Rogers languished in by no means inarticulate confinement in prison. In February 1655, several members of Rogers's London congregation appeared before the Protector to demand his release on the grounds that he was being detained in prison for beliefs which he held in conscience. Cromwell was apparently impressed with the arguments presented by these intercessors, for a few days later the prisoner was brought from Lambeth for a personal interview. Cromwell reasoned patiently and carefully with the preacher. The Government, he pointed out, was endeavouring to preserve the people of God and to maintain religious freedom. Both the Presbyterians and the Fifth Monarchy, if they were in power, would instantly seek to destroy all those who differed from them in religious judgment. Cromwell declared that it was his task to keep "all the godly of several judgments in peace bicause like men falling out in the street, [they] would bang their heads one against another. He was a constable to part them, and keep them in peace."[3] The Government had no intention of forcing all men into the confines of one church, nor did it intend to permit any sect to impose its arbitrary will upon other Christians. When a few days later Harrison, Rich, and other officers added their petition for the release of Rogers and Feake, Cromwell reiterated his position. No one was in prison in England for conscience' sake. But when men masked sedition under the guise of religion the Government could not let such offences go unpunished.

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[1] *Vide ante*, 147–148.

Cromwell made his meaning perfectly clear to the officers by ordering a few days later the arrest of Harrison and Rich upon charges of uncompromising resistance to the constitution of the State.[4] The Government was at this time seriously concerned because of the persistent political plotting of the Fifth Monarchy, attributing the Penruddock rising in March 1655 to the divisions created by the extremists. Feake and Rogers were in consequence ordered to be removed to the Isle of Wight in October 1655,[1] in order to bring to an end their persistent pamphlet attacks upon the person of the Protector. Their imprisonment seems to have been nominal, for Feake soon reappeared in London, where he was permitted to remain in the custody of a single soldier after pledging himself to refrain from further political agitation. Rogers was released at about the same time after he had agreed to retire to the country. Within a few weeks, however, he had returned to the capital, where he launched fresh attacks upon the Government. He was then sent to Carisbrooke Castle, where his missionary zeal was expended upon the soldiers of the guard.

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[1] *Clarke Papers*, III, 13–14.

[2] Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, III, 113.

[3] *Weekly Intelligencer*, February 7, 1655.

[4] Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, III, 117.

The Fifth Monarchy Men raised problems which any government would find it difficult to cope with in a tolerant and judicious manner. They were frankly anarchistic in their political theory, and their views were rendered doubly dangerous by the ferocity and zeal of the leaders of the sect. They demanded for themselves the benefits of religious liberty while frankly avowing that they would extirpate religious groups of a different judgment if they should gain power. Cromwell was disposed to regard their leaders as insane fanatics who should be kept under a mild surveillance save when their views threatened to corrode the discipline of the army or to add strength to royalist plots.

3. Cromwell and the quakers, 1655–1658

The restraint which the Government felt obliged to exercise from time to time against the Fifth Monarchy Men was patently dictated by political requirements. Cromwell's policy toward Quakerism, which under highly effective leadership began to spread with amazing rapidity about 1655, was the consequence of more complex considerations. No other sect in the Civil War period was as universally or as vigorously hated and feared as the Quakers. Their contempt for public authority, their apparent irreverence, their disavowal of the literal truth of Holy Writ, their strange habit and stranger conduct, and their extreme intolerance towards other Christian sects made them appear dangerous to civil and religious stability and aroused the concerted wrath of an age disposed to deal violently with eccentric and anti-social exhibitionism. The restraints under which the Quakers laboured in the revolutionary era were the consequence of an outraged public sentiment which the Government strove steadily to placate and modify. Thus the lower courts almost invariably convicted Quakers under the terms of the Blasphemy Act while the higher courts tended to mitigate to some degree at least the severity of the more representative jurisdictions. The persistent leniency of the Protector towards the sect aroused widespread popular resentment and led to attempts by the magistrates to circumvent the more tolerant attitude of the Government. The Quakers were quick to capitalize the benefits of such martyrdom as their zeal and eccentricity contrived to secure and grew steadily in strength and numbers throughout the period.

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[1] *Clarke Papers*, III, 15, 53, 61.

Cromwell sought to distinguish very carefully and clearly between religious persecution and the maintenance of public order in his policy towards the sect. When Quakers were convicted of brawling, indecency, or disturbing religious assemblies he was inclined not to intervene. At the same time, he would countenance no punishment of a Quaker for purely religious opinions. This attitude was well displayed in the famous interview with George Fox. Cromwell listened with sympathy to the Quaker leader's religious exhortations, and upon parting exclaimed: "Come again to my house! If thou and I were but for an hour of the day together, we should be nearer one to the other. I wish no more harm to thee than I do to my own soul."[1]

Cromwell intervened from time to time in order to temper the excessive zeal of the justices in their heroic efforts to suppress Quaker extravagances. In late 1656 the Government learned that the magistrates had been acting with singular severity. Sectaries were being sent to jail for refusing to uncover in court, they had been whipped under charges of vagabondage, and were ill-treated in prison.[2] These severities had been especially common in the southern counties, though fifteen justices in Dorset were reported as moderate and tolerant in disposing of the difficult problem presented by the extremists. In October the council ordered the release of all Quakers held in Devon, Dorset, Essex, and Suffolk, while the justices on the western assize were instructed to adopt a more lenient attitude.[1] In January 1657, several Quakers who had been committed to jail at Horsham for refusal to uncover in court petitioned the council for relief. That body, having examined the writs and having taken testimony from the justices, the jailers, and the prisoners, ordered the outright release of the petitioners. The council declared that no crime had been proved, the writs were not in proper form, and the prisoners had evidently been committed for a religious and not a civil offence.[2]

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[1] Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, II, 464.

[2] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, cxxx, 46; cliii, 11.

The Quakers, who did not submit to their difficulties meekly, caused the tolerantly disposed Government serious embarrassment by their undiminished missionary zeal and their imperious temper. Thus shortly after the council had intervened in their behalf the leaders of the sect had the temerity to petition Whitehall to appoint magistrates more favourably disposed towards them. Lists of justices of a friendly or tolerant disposition were enclosed, while a list of the "persecuting magistrates" was likewise forwarded for the future guidance of the council.[3]

Quakerism displayed throughout the Cromwellian era that militancy and stubbornness of devotion so characteristic of nascent sectarianism. The communion viewed the existing religious groups as impious and worldy, displaying not the slightest disposition to embrace the philosophy of tolerance to which the older and more conservative sects had been driven by the harsh tuition of persecution and civil war. So long as Quakerism retained this vitality of immaturity it could scarcely be accommodated within the religious framework which the Government had devised. By the close of the period, however, there is evidence that the more moderate leaders of the party had gained a larger perspective and a deeper understanding of the problems which diversity had created in England. A petition signed by twenty Quakers was presented to Cromwell in September 1658, praying for the relief of upwards of one hundred Quakers then in prison. They reminded the Protector that the Civil War had been waged to destroy persecution, yet their co-religionists were detained in prison for beliefs which they held in conscience. The civil State had treated the Quakers harshly and intolerantly. Englishmen should enjoy not only the right of inward belief but should be free in the outward expression of that belief. This liberty Quakerism claimed, "Ffor this we know, yt Christ Jesus alone hath right to rule over ye consciences of men."[1]

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[1] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate,* cliii, 79; cxxx, 45, 61 (October 16, 1656), 79 (February 1, 1657).

[2] *Ibid.*, cliii, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16 (January 6, 1657).

[3] *Ibid.*, cii, 50 (December 1655); cxxx, 46 (October 1656).

The Nayler case and the fanatical excesses of other members of the sect had by 1658 caused a profound reaction amongst the leaders of Quakerism. English public opinion had been outraged and responsible members of the sect realized that some disciplinary restraint must be imposed in order to prevent the shattering of the movement.[2] Quakerism had begun, by the time of the Restoration, to canalize itself, to formulate an ideology, and to define for itself a sectarian status in the religious life of England. The patience and tolerance of the Lord Protector in guarding the sect against its own extremism had not been unimportant in hastening this fruition.

4. CROMWELL AND THE ROMAN CATHOLICS, 1645–1658

The Roman Catholic policy of the Protectorate may be regarded as a tolerant modification of the traditional governmental policy towards this dissenting group. It is indeed remarkable that the political and religious passions aroused by the Civil War did not result in a holocaust of Catholic persecution. Anti-Catholic sentiment had never been stronger or more determined than when the Long Parliament was convened. Puritanism and sectarianism were dominant in England for almost two decades and both groups sprang from a Protestantism inflexibly and violently opposed to Rome and to all things Romish. To these influences was added the deep-seated conviction that the Catholics had fomented rebellion in Ireland and had plotted civil war in England, while the fact that Charles I had found in the Catholics of the realm completely devoted supporters stripped the party of any expectation of charitable consideration.

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[1] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, clxxxii, 138 (September 30, 1658).

[2] *Vide post*, 221–243, for a consideration of the Nayler case.

The English Catholics, then, stood convicted before the bar of sectarian opinion of the double crime of Romanism and Royalism. Their estates had been sequestrated; their priests had been driven beyond the frontiers;[1] they had been compelled to take an awful oath of abjuration;[2] their families had been broken up; and in the year of the parliamentary triumph four of their priests had been executed as a hideous warning that the exercise of Catholic devotions would be tolerated in England no more.[3] The execution of the king marks the nadir of Catholic hopes in England.

However, the Catholic leaders who had watched carefully the rapid shift in power from the Presbyterians to the Independents realized that the tolerant principles which had so greatly implemented the rise of sectarianism to dominance might afford at least some measure of private toleration for Catholics who were interested only in the exercise of their faith and who were willing to lend their loyalty to the Parliamentary Government. In late 1647 a petition signed by nine priests was addressed to the Independent leaders in the name of the lay Catholics of England. These Catholics declared themselves prepared to denounce the papal claim to power to dissolve the bonds of civil obedience, conceded that faith must be kept with heretics, and renounced the teaching that excommunicated persons merited destruction.[4] The petition was summarily rejected by Parliament but attracted the hopeful attention of many prominent English Catholics. In 1648, having been reprinted in France, it was signed by fifty English laymen and was circulated without apparent hindrance in Catholic circles throughout the nation.

The efforts of the lay Catholic party were not relaxed and early in 1649 substantial progress was made in securing some consideration for the claims of the spiritual group. In February of that year an emissary was despatched to Paris with passes from Fairfax to invite Sir Kenelm Digby and other moderate Catholic leaders to come to London for a conference. It was generally understood that the new Government was seriously considering an effort to secure the support of the moderate Catholics by providing "that a free exercise of the Romish religion be granted, and of all other religions whatsoever excepting that which was established by law in the Church of England."[1] At the same time, Sir John Winter was sent to Ireland with vague instructions to negotiate a peace with the rebel party there upon the basis of substantial religious concessions.[2]

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[1] *Moderate Intelligencer*, July 1, 1645.

[2] Firth and Rait, *Acts and Ordinances*, I, 255–256.

[3] Edward Bamber, a secular; Philip Powell, a Benedictine; John Woodcock, a Franciscan; and Thomas Whitaker, a secular.

[4] *Articles proposed to the Catholiques of England, etc.* ([Paris], 1648).

These rather nebulous negotiations were quickly and rudely terminated. The strong Presbyterian party in the Commons was unalterably opposed to the slightest concession to the Catholics, while the disordered state of affairs in Scotland and Ireland recalled the intense devotion of the Romanists to the House of Stuart. Sir John Winter was ordered to return in March, and when Digby reached London in May all interest in his mission had long since evaporated. Indeed, Parliament in November imposed forfeiture of goods and banishment upon all Romanists who had borne arms with the king, while those Catholics who had not served the king were nevertheless to be banished and one half of their properties were to be seized.[3]

Despite the collapse of the attempt to provide formally for some degree of liberty for peaceable Catholics, the Commonwealth was disposed to permit a large degree of liberty to private Roman worship. Only one priest appears to have been put to death under the Commonwealth,[4] and the stringent laws relating to the Catholic laity were, on the whole, not enforced. The

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[1] Carte, Thomas, *A Collection of Original Letters and Papers. . . . Found among the Duke of Ormonde's Papers* (L., 1739), I, 217.

[2] *Clarendon State Papers*, II, §19 (March 9, 1649); Carte, *Collection of Original Letters and Papers*, I, 217.

[3] *V.P.*, November 22, 1649, xxviii, 127–128.

[4] Peter Wright, a Jesuit, who was executed in 1651. (*Middlesex Records*, III, 286.)

Catholics were greatly heartened by this policy of unofficial toleration and about 1650 the missionary efforts of the clergy were resumed. A Presbyterian writer charged that during the years 1650–1652 not fewer than eighteen popish books had been printed in England despite the severe laws in force against such publication. These books, it was alleged, had been printed in large editions and at least 30,000 "popish volumes" had been sold in the nation.[1] In September 1652, a group of angry stationers renewed, in terms suggesting a commercial rather than a spiritual interest, the protest against the illegal licences extended to the Catholics. They charged in *A Beacon set on Fire* that at least twenty popish works had recently been published in England, "and although upon the titles of most of the books there be Paris, or other places beyond the sea, prefixed as if they were printed there; yet we, and all the booksellers and printers in London, that have seen or shall see them, do upon such sight know that they are printed in London; and the founders of printing . . . do infallibly know, that the letters with which the said books are printed, were by them cast and made in London."

The querulous and not disinterested protest of the London stationers was answered from Independent quarters. Colonel Pride and other sectaries in the army savagely attacked the intolerance of the London booksellers and printers. In *The beacons quenched* they declared that the stationers represented a vested interest seeking to impose a Presbyterian tyranny upon the land. Even granted that the offending books were popish and heretical, "if there be equall liberty of engaging against them, when did the most glorious Sun Christ Jesus not dare to meet the darkest night, attended with ten thousand popes or devills?"[2] Liberty of printing and writing must be preserved at all costs. It was only by God's grace that after Rome burned Hus "this inestimable jewel of printing" was given to the world. England should extend to the papists freedom to publish, for no Romanist can write anything that truth cannot answer.

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[1] [Fawne, Luke, *et al.*], *A second beacon fired, etc.* (L., 1654), 2–3; *Mercurius Politicus*, October 12, 1654.

[2] *The beacons quenched: or the humble information of divers officers of the army, and other wel-affected persons, to the parliament and Commonwealth of England, etc.* (L., 1652), 7.

And in any case, most of the popish books listed by the stationers are nothing more than Catholic treatises on moral divinity which enjoy a universal efficacy. "If those books have nineteen parts of good matter, and the twentieth part popery, it were great pity the much good should suffer for the little evill."[1]

Meanwhile in Ireland the Catholics were labouring under more ruinous disabilities. Cromwell had repressed the rebellion there with dispatch, extreme rigour, and thoroughness. He had gone to Ireland convinced that Catholicism under the leadership of the Irish priesthood had been responsible for the outbreak of an insurrection which had constantly menaced the parliamentary cause. Upon his arrival he announced that Catholicism enjoyed no legal status in the island and that the laws against it were to be severely enforced. In a revealing letter to the governor of Ross he declared: "I meddle not with any man's conscience. But if by liberty of conscience, you mean a liberty to exercise the mass, I judge it best to exercise plain dealing and to let you know where the Parliament of England have power, that will not be allowed of. As for the people, what thoughts they have in matters of religion in their own breasts I cannot reach, but shall think it my duty, if they walk honestly and peaceably, not to cause them in the least to suffer for the same."[2] Cromwell had announced, in words reminiscent of Elizabeth, that the public exercise of the Catholic faith could not be permitted in Ireland. Catholicism was dominant in the island and had recently been rebellious in its temper. Political necessity required that its organization and public status should be destroyed. At the same time, he admitted that the human conscience could not and should not be coerced. The Government would pry by inquisitorial means into the conscience of no man who kept the peace and who contented himself with private devotions.

In England Cromwell assumed as Lord Protector a more moderate and tolerant position. The Catholics were there a minority sect, discredited in the public estimation, divided amongst themselves, and without effective organization. The Protector extended to the Catholics in England as large a measure of toleration as public opinion would countenance and political safety permit.

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[1] *The beacons quenched: or the humble information of divers officers of the army, and other wel-affected persons, to the parliament and Commonwealth of England, etc.*, 12–13. The officers applauded vigorously the thought and temper of the great Catholic defence of toleration, *The Christian Moderator* (L., 1651).

[2] Quoted in Firth, *Oliver Cromwell*, 267.

The Nominated Parliament dealt but briefly and indecisively with the Catholic problem. The Government was severely straitened financially and seemed more interested in the Romanists as a potential source of revenue than in their spiritual demerits. A bill was introduced in September 1653, designed to enable parliamentary commissioners to compound Catholic estates already legally declared forfeited.[1] The sudden dissolution of Parliament prevented further consideration of the bill, and a year later the Venetian correspondent reported that the Catholics were daily gaining ground in the nation.[2]

The Catholic laity were throughout the Protectorate in no serious danger of corporal pains because of the exercise of the religious offices of their faith. The priesthood was, however, on sufferance and might during periods of political crisis be subject to very grave personal danger. Thus the Royalist plot against Cromwell's life in May 1654,[3] aroused grave apprehension in an England just regaining stability, and there was a widespread suspicion that the Catholics were intimately involved in the conspiracy. An aged and guiltless priest, John Southworth, expiated the baseless fears of Puritan England. Southworth, according to Whitelocke, had previously been condemned, but his sentence had been remitted on condition of banishment.[4] He had but recently returned to London and when he was arrested all of the incriminating requisites for saying mass were found in his possession.[5] The priest was speedily condemned to death. Cromwell, in discussing the case with the Catholic envoys, who had joined in a petition for clemency, appeared deeply moved. He declared himself "opposed to violence in matters of religion and in favour of liberty of conscience for all."[6] None the less, he held that the priest had been fairly tried and condemned under the unrepealed statute of 27 *Elizabeth*, c. 2, and therefore declined to intervene. Southworth was executed on June 28, 1654, the only priest to die under the Protectorate and perhaps the last to suffer death in England simply for the offence of being a priest.[1]

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[1] *Several Proceedings in Parliament*, September 13, 1653; *V.P.*, October 3, 1653, xxix, 133, 150.

[2] *V.P.*, November 2, 1654, xxix, 274.

[3] Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, II, 456 ff.

[4] Whitelocke, *Memorials of English Affairs*, IV, 113.

[5] *V.P.*, July 9, 1654, xxix, 233.

[6] *Ibid.*, xxix, 234.

The Catholics, it will be recalled, had been specifically excluded from legal toleration under the terms of the *Instrument of Government*. As we have indicated, however, Cromwell consistently interpreted the constitution broadly, seeking by administrative policy to establish as comprehensive a tolerance as was consistent with political stability. The Protector, in his treatment of the Catholic problem, was inclined to strain the letter of the law as far in the interests of leniency as public and parliamentary opinion would permit. The Catholic laity were under his administration more humanely and evenly treated than at any time since the promulgation of the Elizabethan penal statutes. The Venetian Sagredo, writing in October 1655, estimated that at least one-fourth of the nation was Catholic.[2] Cromwell indicated to the French Government that his clemency was restrained only by the disloyalty and intolerance of his Catholic subjects.[3] The estates of royalist Catholics were still held by the Government, but in this respect their lot was but slightly worse than that of the Anglican supporters of the lost cause.

The greatest gain of the Catholic laity had come with the repeal in 1650 of the entire body of penal legislation regulating religious offences. The complicated structure of the recusancy laws had been deliberately destroyed by this act and prosecutions under these statutes were no longer possible. Cromwell in 1655 pointed out that there was no legal provision for testing the loyalty of suspected Catholics and recommended that the oath of abjuration passed by the Long Parliament on August 18, 1643, be revived.[4] This oath renounced the temporal power of the papacy, the doctrines of transubstantiation and purgatory, and other characteristic Catholic teachings. The Government, it should be said, proposed to employ the oath only in the case of adult Catholics whose loyalty was suspect. The Venetian correspondent felt that Cromwell's action was inspired not only by political considerations but by the desire to check to some degree the remarkable revival of Catholic missionary effort which the leniency of the Protectorate had made possible.[1] No orthodox Catholic could possibly take the required oath, and, though recusancy fines were no longer levied, a considerable burden was laid upon the devout by the exactions assessed upon refusal to subscribe. The effort of the Government to halt the renascence of Catholicism had been at least partially successful, for "this severity lops off the branches which would otherwise increase notably, and stay the fertility of the true religion,which many profess at heart although outwardly they repudiate it."[2]

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[1] *Middlesex Records*, III, 390.

[2] *V.P.*, xxx, 115.

[3] *Thurloe Papers*, II, 658–659.

[4] Firth and Rait, *Acts and Ordinances*, I, 255–256.

The royalist insurrection in April 1655, was responsible for a burst of fairly severe imposition of the oath upon suspected Catholics, and a number of priests were imprisoned for a short time. But the Government now felt secure and in the absence of fear the Catholics were extended an unofficial but practical toleration. More than twenty priests were in this period attached to the Venetian embassy where six masses were celebrated "every working day and ten on festivals." All services in the embassy were crowded and neither the "ample space of the chapel" nor the number of masses was adequate.[3] The chapels of the other Catholic embassies were equally crowded and all of them were expanding their corps of priests. The Government, Sagredo felt, deeply regretted the execution of Southworth, which had resulted in many conversions, and was steadily declining to punish English priests beyond banishment. The Venetian drily observed that although "the present government deprives the Catholics of their goods, it allows them to hear as many masses as they wish." The Roman Catholics were being treated with a more consistent leniency than they had experienced under the Stuarts and no real impediment was placed in the way of unostentatious worship. The Government "privately gave liberty of mass to all; and Romish priests and

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[1] *V.P.*, May 15, 1655, xxx, 54–55, 63; *S.P. Dom.*, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, xcvi, 57.

[2] *V.P.*, October 1, 1655, xxx, 114–115.

[3] *Ibid.*, October 29, 1655, xxx, 129.

Jesuits, who by law were guilty of death, never had more freedom, nor ever more boldly carry'd on their disigns in the camp, court, and pulpit."[1]

The outbreak of war with Spain had the inevitable effect of reviving the distrust and hatred which the mass of Englishmen had for so many decades held for the Catholics. This fear was not wholly shared by Cromwell, who, though he declared the Spanish war to be a crusade against popery, intervened from time to time to mitigate the excessive zeal of public and parliamentary opinion. The London clergy, always strongly Puritan in temper, had long been outraged by the open connivance at the public celebration of Catholic services in the embassies. As hostility against Spain mounted, these divines attacked most violently the Government's leniency. The council was accordingly obliged to bestir itself, and in March 1656 English subjects attending mass at the Portuguese embassy were arrested. They were released only after the payment of heavy fines,[2] and the Venetian representatives were sure that Cromwell had resolved upon the "utter destruction and extirpation of the Catholic religion" in England.[3] Somewhat earlier Sagredo reported that the popularity of his own chapel had excited vigorous protests from the London clergy. The council had recommended the promulgation of an ordinance limiting attendance at embassy services to the ambassador's household, but Cromwell would not tolerate this infringement upon diplomatic and religious freedom. In early January guards were set around the embassy following the complaint of certain justices concerning "the great resort of English and Irish to the Venetian Embassadors lodgings, and other places within that county for the hearing of mass . . . and . . . [because] severall English priests were there permitted to say mass and did usually preach in English."[4] A large number of English and Irish citizens were arrested upon leaving mass, but were released under bail.[5]

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[1] Echard, Laurence, *History of England, from the First Entrance of Julius Caesar . . . to . . .* 1688 (L., 1720), 719.

[2] *V.P.*, March 3, 1656, xxx, 185.

[3] *Ibid.*, April 7, 1656, xxx, 200, *et vide* 185, 190, 223, 263.

[4] *Mercurius Politicus*, January 12, 1656.

[5] The Venetian envoy (*V.P.*, xxx, 167) estimated the number as 400; *Mercurius Politicus*, as 100. Cf. *Add. MSS.*, 27962, f.2d.

An important bill was introduced in Parliament on November 29, 1656, designed to remedy the lack of legislation for the conviction of "notorious recusancy."[1] At the same time, Parliament ordered a watch to be set on the embassies to which the Catholics had been resorting in such extraordinary numbers after it had become apparent that the Government would not vigorously prosecute known recusants.[2] Sagredo was convinced that Cromwell was not then in a position to oppose penal legislation because of his desperate financial requirements. Indeed, the English Catholics would, he suspected, "find it convenient by paying two-thirds of their property, to purchase liberty to worship in their own fashion."[3] At the same time, he felt that the Catholic goose had been plucked too often, since the English laity were "exhausted and downtrodden, [and] almost entirely stripped of their possessions."[4]

The parliamentary bill which Sagredo regarded so pessimistically was designed to regularize and extend the wholly ineffective ordinance of 1654. The preamble ascribed the remarkable increase in recusancy during recent years to the laxity of the laws and governmental policy. The bill obliged all justices and judges to summon suspected persons before them and to require such persons to take the oath of abjuration. Those who declined to do so were to be adjudged recusants and should thereupon forfeit two-thirds of their estates to the Government. Moreover, any English subject celebrating mass in the chapel of a foreign embassy should be fined £100. The bill was savagely reactionary in character. It represented a return to the traditional Elizabethan formula, and, if enforced, would nullify the very substantial progress which had been made during the previous seven years in the solution of the Roman Catholic problem.[5] The grave threat which the proposed legislation offered to the tolerant principles of Cromwell's Government was readily appreciated by a strong minority in Parliament, and a vigorous and constructive opposition on the solid grounds of religious liberty was offered when on December 3, 1656, the measure reached its second reading.[1]

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[1] *C.J.*, VII, 577; *V.P.*, xxxi, 38, 73. (It passed its third reading on June 26, 1657.)

[2] *V.P.*, xxxi, 36, 38.

[3] *Ibid.*, xxx, 306.

[4] *Ibid.*, June 23, 1657, xxxi, 73.

[5] Firth, C. H., *The Last Years of the Protectorate*, 1656–1658 (N.Y. and L., 1909), I, 75.

The opposition subjected the bill to a detailed and searching criticism which is worthy of extended notice. Bond assailed the clause which held a man liable for the recusancy of his wife as a "desperate" and tyrannous device.[2] Various members pointed out that the law placed an arbitrary and discretionary power in the hands of the justices which might be exploited to tyrannical ends.[3] Sir Gilbert Pickering argued that a tolerant government could rightfully require no more of its Catholic subjects than the renunciation of the temporal powers of the papacy, and deplored the punishment of any man for his religious convictions.[4] Under the leadership of Lambert, the opposition succeeded in referring the measure back to committee, where it remained for months while strenuous objections were raised against both the principle and the details of the proposal.[5]

The bill was reported out on May 29, 1657, and debate was resumed. Bampfield, in a heated speech, compared the measure to the oath *ex officio* and declared that it smacked of the Spanish Inquisition. Bedford replied rather peevishly that the question of the oath had been thoroughly canvassed in committee and no other formula could be devised for the detection of papists.[6] Strickland, who was a member of the council and who was regarded as representing the Lord Protector's position, supported Bampfield's objections. He held that the machinery envisaged by the bill unquestionably smacked of the Inquisition. Nor could any support be found for it in English law. He knew of no way to convict men in England save by the testimony of witnesses before a jury. Baynes remarked that such legislation in England would not compare favourably with the concessions which Cromwell had gained for English subjects dwelling in Catholic lands. Another member solemnly warned the Parliament of the grave danger in reviving tests of doctrinal orthodoxy: "We do not know what times may come. Those things [which the bill condemns] may be asserted for truths, and we, under some penalty, may be compelled to swear to them."[1] True faith cannot be protected nor can error be extirpated by pains and penalties. This position received warm support from Colonel Briscoe (Cumberland), who declared that, though there were many Catholics in his county, the tyranny which the proposed law would set in motion was not necessary for their restraint. During the war with Spain there had perhaps been some reasonable justification for the measure, but certainly there was none now. The proposed oath was fully as iniquitous and infamous as was the oath *ex officio*. The member solemnly admonished Parliament: "You hold forth a liberty of conscience, and such, as his Highness observes, was never since Christ's time. Consider what an indulgence and favour you hold to one sort of unsound persons, and so severe against others; though the one may be as unsound as the other. It is neither of ingenuity nor integrity."[2] To the persistent argument of the supporters of the bill that effective steps must be taken to check the rapid growth of recusancy, Godfrey replied that injustice and intolerance could correct neither the impiety nor the number of Catholics. "I think they are the worst of men; and imitating their practices, the worst of their practices, is to imitate the worst of men in the worst of practices. I know no difference between it and the Inquisition; only the one racks and torments the purse, the other the person and the body." The oath of abjuration, he concluded, was wholly inconsistent with the glorious principle of liberty of conscience to which Parliament had professed such complete devotion.[3]

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[1] *Mercurius Politicus*, December 3, 1656.

[2] Burton, *Diary*, I, 6.

[3] *Ibid.*, I, 7.

[4] *Ibid.*, I, 8.

[5] *Ibid.*, I, 117, 148.

[6] *Ibid.*, II, 149.

But traditional and conservative opinion prevailed by the decisive majority of 88–43 when Parliament divided on the bill.[4] Fear and hatred of the Roman Catholics outweighed the as yet nervous and timid devotion of Parliament to the principles of religious toleration. However, it is heartening to reflect that in a House composed almost exclusively of Puritan and sectarian members nearly one-third of that body had argued and voted against a recusancy measure which, when contrasted with the legislation of a generation earlier, was both mild and lax. The toleration of Roman Catholicism has ever provided the infallible and almost cruel test for the devotion of Protestant sectarianism to religious liberty. And in the light of this test England had made enormous strides, under the tuition of Oliver Cromwell and the steady erosion of orthodox theory, in the direction of religious liberty.

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, II, 150.

[2] *Ibid.*, II, 151.

[3] *Ibid.*, II, 153.

[4] *Mercurius Politicus*, §368 (June 18, 1657).

The parliamentary enactment was most distasteful to Cromwell. Not only did it violate his conception of religious freedom, but it was definitely antithetical to the terms of his recent alliance with France. As late as December 1656, Bordeaux had assured his Government that the Protectorate was extending a reasonable toleration to Catholicism. He had found Catholic worship unmolested in the capital and had indicated that even the priests enjoyed all necessary liberty. But the stern anti-Catholic temper of Parliament thoroughly alarmed the French ambassador, who, on December 25, 1656, interceded with Cromwell to protect the English Catholics, recalling the terms of the alliance and reminding the Protector of the French efforts on behalf of the Vaudois. On the following day Cromwell wrote to Mazarin in order to dispel his legitimate apprehensions. The English Government could not in view of its existing problems publicly proclaim a toleration of Catholics. But it had sought and would continue to seek to deal moderately and compassionately with the recusants. Cromwell reminded the French minister that he had saved many Catholics from "the raging fire of persecution, which did tyrannize over their consciences, and encroached by an arbitrariness of power upon their estates." The Government intended in so far as possible to maintain this policy and gradually to lighten further the disabilities of loyal Catholics.[1] Even stronger private assurances were given by Lockhart (Paris) in April that the Lord Protector was not disposed to seek a vigorous enforcement of the parliamentary enactment, and Brienne, wholly satisfied, instructed Bordeaux not to press for further concessions to the Catholics.[2]

The less intimately informed Venetian representative likewise sensed the Government's distaste for the abjuration bill. Shortly after its passage Giavarina wrote that Parliament had shown itself determined to "squeeze" yet a little from the downtrodden Catholics.[3] Cromwell had not yet given his consent to the

[1] Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, III, 5–6.

[2] *Thurloe Papers*, VI, 214 (April 28, 1657).

[3] *V.P.*, June 15, 1657, xxxi, 68.

measure, but would be obliged to do so in order to quiet public apprehensions and to secure badly needed funds from Parliament.[1] The London clergy had lent shrill support to the enactment, denouncing all Catholics as "Spaniards, the bitter enemies of this state and the most scandalous beings upon earth."[2] Cromwell, the Venetian predicted, could not long resist the powerful demand for its enactment, though he had again given private assurances to the French ambassador "that he would do all in his power to prevent the act or at least the execution of its most severe articles."[3] The Protector had likewise discussed the matter with several leading Catholic gentlemen who had assured him that at least £100,000, as compared with the £80,000 then being received by the Exchequer from the Catholics, would be paid if Cromwell could forestall the legislation.[4] But Cromwell could no longer resist the combined pressure of Parliament and of a highly vocal public opinion. On June 26, 1657, he lent his consent to the bill, and just a month later the Venetian correspondent reported that it was being enforced.[5]

The Government, however, scrupulously fulfilled its pledges to the French Government. By careful administrative control Cromwell was able to enforce the law sparingly. On the whole, the legislation had the effect of slightly augmenting the revenues of the Protectorate while bringing the missionary priests under closer control. There is no evidence to indicate that the oath was administered to the lay Catholics in an indiscriminate fashion, and above all no lives were taken. The Roman Catholic leaders were now fully convinced that the Government had no intention of inaugurating a wholesale repression, feeling that Cromwell's only interest in the enforcement of the recent act lay in the augmentation which it provided for his revenues. In October, Giavarina reported that the Catholic leaders had offered Cromwell £50,000 if the execution of the act could be suspended. Cromwell, he indicated, had demanded £80,000, and the Catholics were holding informal conferences to determine whether so large a sum could be raised.[6] Throughout the autumn the enforcement of the law was accordingly postponed.[1]

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[1] *V.P.*, June 22, 1657, xxxi, 72.

[2] *Ibid.*, xxxi, 69.

[3] *Ibid.*, xxxi, 72.

[4] *Ibid.*, July 6, 1657, xxxi, 78.

[5] *Ibid.*, July 13, 1657, xxxi, 82; July 27, 1657, xxxi, 89.

[6] *Ibid.*, October 5, 1657, xxxi, 116.

A second session of the Parliament that had passed the act had been summoned for January 1658, and Cromwell, desirous of placating the members, instituted a partial enforcement of the law about a month before the convention[2]. But the Government's activity was confined to the arrest of eight or nine priests in London, who had been betrayed by abjuring Catholics. The property of these clerics was seized, but the priests were shortly released without having been brought to trial.[3] The laity were apparently not disturbed, and aside from a rather feeble effort to increase the revenue from the recusants no repressive consequences are to be observed from the statute requiring abjuration. And even the pecuniary pains of the Catholics in this period, regrettable as they were, have been exaggerated. Lingard points out that in 1650 the annual rents of sequestered Catholic properties amounted to slightly more than £62,000, with thirteen counties not reported.[4] Five years later the number of persons under sequestration was 1,582, including both Catholics and delinquents.[5] In the year following the passage of the abjuration law the revenues received from Romanist and delinquent sources had fallen to slightly less than £55,000. Unquestionably a considerable number of wealthy and influential Catholics, whose loyalty to the existing regime was suspect, had been ruined by crushing penalties. But it is extremely difficult in these cases to assess with precision the importance of the religious consideration in the policy of the Government. It may be said with certainty, however, that the Catholic laity at large were not during the Protectorate subject to ruinous penalties inspired purely by a desire to extirpate the party. Cromwell, as his power and position became more secure, had been disposed to treat the Catholics mildly and had incurred the grave risk of alienating public opinion by ignoring the persistent orthodox demands for their ruin. The Catholics gained from Cromwell a more reasoned and consistent toleration than from the House of Stuart with whom their hopes were unfortunately linked.

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[1] *V.P.*, November 2, 1657, xxxi, 124–125.

[2] *Ibid.*, February 2, 1658, xxxi, 160.

[3] *Mercurius Politicus*, December 5, December 23, 1657; *V.P.*, xxxi, 160.

[4] Lingard, *History of England*, VIII, 396.

[5] *Calendar of State Papers for Compounding* (1643–1660), I, 741–742.

5. Cromwell and the anglicans, 1645–1658

Cromwell's greatest failure lay in his inability to conciliate moderate Anglicanism by incorporating it into the fabric of the National Church, or at least by granting to it the status of a tolerated sect. We have observed that the wounds of the Civil War had been deep in England. The Presbyterian majority in Parliament had been irreconcilably opposed to the slightest concession to Anglicanism, while devotion to the Church of England had become a natural symbol of devotion to the crown. Cromwell, as well as a large segment of sectarian thought, was prepared to extend the limits of toleration so far as to include Anglican worship. Unfortunately, however, Anglicanism had during the previous generation embraced a rigid and exclusive institutional conception which bound it inseparably with episcopacy. The exclusive character of its pretensions made it impossible to accommodate the Church of England formally within the framework of Cromwell's religious establishment, while prelacy had by virtue of Laud's definition become anathema to the most tolerant elements of sectarian thought, even though it had undergone a remarkable moderation since the collapse of the Anglo-Catholic leadership. Anglicanism was consequently an insoluble irritant in the body of the Cromwellian state. There is abundant evidence to show that the mass of Englishmen had never accepted Laud's conception of the Church, and that there had been a salutary and profoundly important reversion of Anglican thought to the historical simplicity and the essentially Protestant conception of the Church. The mass of Englishmen remained patiently but stubbornly devoted to this liberal conception of a State Church, and the valiant evangelism of the sects and the comprehensive tolerance of the Government were quite ineffective to persuade the nation from this position. Cromwell was wholly unwilling to employ the arm of force in the reduction of this Anglican core in the religious life of the nation; this task he placed in the hands of God and the preaching of the godly ministers. England entered the Civil Wars and emerged from the Interregnum predominantly Anglican, though sectarianism had made enormous and permanent gains.

We have previously discussed the steps taken by the Long Parliament to destroy the framework of the Establishment and to outlaw Anglican worship. The Directory, which had been validated by Parliament, expressly prohibited the further use of the Book of Common Prayer,[1] while a supplementary ordinance forbade the use of the Prayer Book in public or private worship under progressive penalties.[2] None the less, Anglican services were held freely during most of the Civil War period and no systematic effort was made to enforce the prohibitory ordinances. In December 1647, vigorous complaints were made in Parliament against the wide use of the Book of Common Prayer in London. Services were normally held in private houses,[3] and in many cases deprived ministers were maintained by their former parishioners to conduct frequent if irregular services for their charges. Even in Norwich, one of the most fervent sectarian centres in England, the Book of Common Prayer was in this period commonly employed.[4] The practice of informal worship, so long as the Book of Common Prayer was not used, was probably legally possible under the ordinance of 1641 which permitted parishioners to set up a minister as a lecturer at their own expense "to preach every Lord's Day where there is no preaching, and to preach one day in every week where there is no weekly lecture."[5]

During the Commonwealth and Protectorate the Puritan rigour, particularly against the Anglican clergy, was slowly but progressively relaxed. Cromwell was prepared to extend a large measure of administrative tolerance to Anglican ministers who refrained from participation in royalist plots and who devoted themselves to their spiritual duties. Shortly after the serious uprising of 1655 it was regarded as necessary to review the efforts of the Commission for the ejection of scandalous ministers during more than a decade of its existence. The reports of the major-generals entrusted with this survey indicated that ejections had never been systematically undertaken, that very few ejections indeed had taken place since 1647, and that Anglicanism was widely and freely tolerated.

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[1] Firth and Rait, *Acts and Ordinances*, I, 582 ff.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 755 ff.

[3] Evelyn, John, *Diary of John Evelyn, etc.* (L., 1879), II, 25, 45, 49, 50, 74, 76, 79, 80, 88, 95–96, *et passim.*

[4] *The Victoria History of the Counties of England* (Norfolk), II, 293 (April, 1648).

[5] Quoted in Tatham, G. B., *The Puritans in Power*, 1640–1660 (Cambridge, 1913), 230.

The estimates of the total number of Anglican ministers ejected from their livings range from Neal's modest 1,600[1] to Walker's violently partisan six to ten thousand.[2] It is significant that an examination of Walker's lists reveals considerably under 2,500 names, of which number many were pluralists. It seems probable that the number of ejections between 1640 and 1658 was not fewer than 2,000 and not in excess of 3,000.[3] That is to say, very nearly three-fourths of the parish ministers of England remained, through conscientious dislike of Anglo-Catholicism, through a convenient conscience, through piety and outstanding merit, or through the protection of obscurity, in the undisturbed possession of their benefices. Even a casual examination of the evidence reveals that in the majority of instances the ejected clergy were guilty of ardent support of the royalist cause and were hence deprived for reasons of political necessity, or were convicted, usually after a careful consideration of the evidence, of scandalous or unworthy conduct.

Thus in Hertfordshire, one of the strongholds of Puritanism, between nineteen and thirty of the clergy lost their livings, for the most part in 1643.[4] In the majority of cases either incompetency or malignancy seems to have been proved, and the evidence would indicate that "so long as an incumbent kept himself clear of the crowning offence of seeking to influence his parishioners against the Parliament, and of extreme points of ceremonial, he was respected and left undisturbed by Parliament in the exercise of his ministry." About one-third of the clergy were ejected in Leicestershire during the period 1640–1655.[1] Very few sequestrations can be proved in Rutland.[2] About 110 ministers were ejected in Somersetshire,[3] where the survival of the records of one of the sequestrators throws an interesting light on the operations of the Commission. In this county William Haskett was deprived for railing against Parliament, for inciting the people to take up arms for the king, and for scandalous living. Hugh Collins was ejected on charges of lewd and scandalous conduct, having an illegitimate child, and carrying intelligence to the king. Another minister was deprived for devotion to the Book of Common Prayer, while yet another was ejected as a pluralist.[4] Relatively few ejections appear to have occurred in Huntingdonshire, Surrey, and Sussex, and they seem on the whole to have been merited.[5] The commissioners in Suffolk acted with greater harshness, some sixty-five Anglicans being deprived.[6] In Bedfordshire somewhat less than one-fifth of the clergy appear to have been deprived.[7] In Buckinghamshire and Berkshire the commissioners appear to have been lenient, about one-seventh of the clergy having been ejected.[8] In the staunchly Puritan county of Dorset about seventy Anglicans were deprived of their livings,[9] while in Derbyshire almost one-third of the established clergy lost their benefices.[10]

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[1] Neal, Daniel, *The History of the Puritans, etc.* (L., 1837), II, 261–262.

[2] Walker, John, *An attempt towards recovering an account of the number and sufferings of the clergy of the Church of England* (L., 1714), I, 199–200, xviii.

[3] Morley (*Oliver Cromwell*, 387) estimates that about 2,000 of the clergy were ejected. Stoughton (*Ecclesiastical History of England*, II, 543) inclines towards a slightly higher estimate. Tatham (*Dr. John Walker and the Sufferings of the Clergy*, 132), while admitting that no accurate estimate can be reached, suggests 3,500 parochial sequestrations as roughly accurate.

[4] Kingston, Alfred, *Hertfordshire during the Great Civil War and the Long Parliament* (L., 1894), 170; *V.C.H.* (Hertfordshire), IV, 341.

In the great majority of parishes, therefore, the religious life of the community was not disturbed by the violence of ejection.

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[1] *V.C.H.* (Leicester), I, 380–381. The writer, Sister Elspeth, admits thirty-nine from Walker's lists, adds nine from *Add. MSS.*, 15669–15671, eight from *H.M.C. Reports*, VII, *App.*, 101–105, and three from other sources. *Vide* also Tatham, *Dr. John Walker and the Sufferings of the Clergy* (Cambridge, 1911), 131.

[2] *V.C.H.* (Rutland), I, 155.

[3] *V.C.H.* (Somerset), II, 48.

[4] *V.C.H.* (Somerset), II, 48; *Somerset Arch. Proc.*, IV (ii), 60, XVI (ii), 13.

[5] *V.C.H.* (Huntingdon), I, 368–369, (Surrey), II, 32, (Sussex), II, 35.

[6] *Suffolk Arch. Inst. Proc.*, IX, 307–309.

[7] *V.C.H.* (Bedford), I, 338.

[8] *V.C.H.* (Buckinghamshire), I, 327, (Berkshire), II, 42.

[9] *V.C.H.* (Dorset), II, 37; Tatham, *Dr. John Walker and the Sufferings of the Clergy*, 131; Densham, W. and Ogle, J., *The Story of the Congregational Churches of Dorset* (Bournemouth, 1899), 407–415.

[10] *V.C.H.* (Derby), II, 28.

In most instances, it may be assumed, the parish priests reflected the religious views of their charges and in many cases continued to conduct religious services, with certain discreet modifications, to the satisfaction of the moderate Anglicans. Such parishes and such ministers offered little difficulty to the Government and were rarely disturbed. A far more vexatious problem was presented by the hundreds of ejected Anglican ministers who had been deprived because of their royalism or unfitness, or for particularly conspicuous loyalty to the traditional religious order.

The Government had long connived at the private preaching of these unfortunate clergymen, and in some cases they had been befriended by Cromwell. The apprehensions provoked by the Penruddock rising, however, resulted in a severer policy. An ordinance dated November 1, 1655, forbade any royalist to maintain an ejected minister as a chaplain or tutor under pain of fine, and prohibited such clergymen from teaching, preaching, administering the sacraments, celebrating marriages, or using the Book of Common Prayer under penalty of light imprisonment for the first offence and banishment for the third.[1] Within a few days, however, the ordinance was reissued in a considerably milder form. The ejected clergy might upon proof of their "godliness and good affection to the present Government" continue in the exercise of their clerical duties.[2] The Government sought to make it clear that such restraints as it imposed upon religious freedom were dictated by political necessity. The future policy towards the Anglican clergy would consequently be determined by their loyalty and behaviour. The Government pledged itself to administer its policy with as much "tenderness . . . as may consist with the safety and good of this nation."

The Anglicans feared that the enforcement of this ordinance would bring to an end the policy of unofficial toleration which had thus far prevailed. But Cromwell had no taste for religious persecution and was fully prepared to mitigate the severity of the ordinance for those Anglican ministers whose civil conduct was beyond question. In January 1656, he listened sympathetically to a petition from Archbishop Ussher, presented on behalf of the ejected clergy, urging gentleness and tolerance upon the Lord Protector. Some days later Cromwell summoned several of the leading Anglican ministers to Whitehall in order to clarify his policy. He renounced all intention to oppress conscience. He was compelled by political requirements to demand an engagement from the ejected clergy to refrain from sedition and rebellion. But if this could be given, he was prepared to recommend their case to his council.[1]

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[1] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate,* c,136 (September 21, 1655); cii, 76 (December 10, 1655).

[2] Numerous ejected clergymen did secure the approval of the "commissioners for approbation," and subsequently were granted licences. (*S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate,* cxxx, 100, 101 (November 11, 1656); cliii, 17, 18, 19; clxxx, 66, 163; clxxxi, 98 (June 10, 1658).

The *Declaration* against the ejected clergy was never officially withdrawn, but it was from the beginning nullified by non-enforcement. Gardiner knew of no instance of the ejection of an Anglican divine from a post in a private household.[2] Cromwell treated several of the moderate Anglican ministers with great courtesy and respect, and gave to Ussher a state funeral at Westminster at considerable personal expense.[3] Cromwell could not bring himself, despite steady pressure from some of his closest advisers, to deal harshly with pious and conscientious men. Bishop Kennett related that Cromwell had declared himself unable to disturb the Anglicans in the exercise of that religious liberty which he and his followers had always defended and acknowledged. When in 1656 a deputation of London clergymen waited upon him to complain that the Anglican clerics were taking their congregations away from them, Cromwell enquired: "After what manner do the cavaliers debauch your people?" "By preaching," said the ministers. "Then preach back again," the Lord Protector replied in dismissing them.[4]

The short-lived renewal of severity against the Anglican divines seems never to have extended much beyond London. The rural clergy continued to use the traditional services, usually with minor modifications, or from memory, without fear of serious consequences. Thomas Fuller knew of few ministers who had been disturbed either in Essex or in the capital. The great Anglican historian took not the slightest notice of the *Declaration*, continuing his ministry without interruption. When he was summoned to appear before the board of triers for examination, Fuller solicited the aid of John Howe, the preacher at St. Margaret's, Westminster. The rotund and witty Anglican remarked to Howe: "Sir, you may perceive that I am a pretty corpulent man, and I am to go through a passage that is very strait: I beg you would be so good as to give me a shove and help me through."[1] The board expressed itself as well satisfied with Fuller's credentials and he was permitted to continue in his parish.

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[1] Quoted in Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, III, 192.

[2] Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, III, 192.

[3] Carr, J. A., *The Life and Times of James Ussher, etc.* (L., 1895), 370–371.

[4] Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, 431–432.

Though officially proscribed, the Anglican Church, with the connivance of the Government, maintained its services throughout the period of the Commonwealth and Protectorate.[2] At no time was the Church subjected to a really severe persecution. Thousands of sound Anglican clergymen had taken the Covenant and had satisfied the triers without substantial difficulties of conscience, while Bishops Skinner and King were ordaining a new succession of clergy.[3] The ejection of the Anglican fellows from the universities had by no means ended their services there, and at Oxford a large congregation of Anglicans worshipped for several years without serious interference.[4] No instance has been proved of an Anglican who was imprisoned for purely religious reasons. Christenings, burials, and marriages were performed according to the Anglican rites with tolerable freedom.[5] In numerous rural counties ministers conducted the traditional services throughout the period without molestation.[6] Thomas Jessop, a minister in Bedfordshire, complained bitterly that for eight years the "prelatical party" had withdrawn from his church and had maintained the traditional worship.[1] In Cumberland, Thomas Denton wrote some thirty years later, "the Common Prayer was read in the church of Sebergham in all ye late times of trouble, and we never had a phanatick in the parish."[2] Bishop Juxon presided during this period at Little Compton (Gloucestershire), where he conducted divine services every Sunday for many persons in the neighbourhood.[3] Bishop Skinner likewise seems to have held a living throughout the revolutionary era. George Bull preached near Bristol, using the service from the liturgy which he knew by heart. In Essex, the ejectors for the county were inspired by the Government's *Declaration* to convene a meeting of the ministers of the county at Chelmsford, but apparently no further steps were taken to secure the restraint of the Anglican divines of that region.[4]

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[1] Fuller, Morris, *The Life, Times and Writings of Thomas Fuller, etc.* (L., 1886), II, 260.

[2] Firth, *Oliver Cromwell*, 361.

[3] Plumptre, E. H., *The Life of Thomas Ken, etc.* (L., 1890), I, 54.

[4] Orme, William, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Religious Connexions of John Owen, etc.* (L., 1820), 188; Wood, Anthony, *Athenae Oxonienses, etc.* (L., 1813–1820), III, 1059.

[5] *V.C.H.* (Leicester), I, 382; Evelyn, *Diary*, II, 76, 79, 87, 88; III, 238–239.

[6] *V.C.H.* (Suffolk), II, 42; (Bedford), I, 340,—in Bedfordshire only eleven ministers refused to conform in 1662, *ibid.*, I, 342; (Cumberland), II, 94; J. E. Bailey (*The Life of Thomas Fuller, etc.* (L., 1874), 597) states that throughout the Protectorate "the country clergy in possession of the parochial livings were permitted to use the Common Prayer if the local ecclesiastical boards did not object, or to use it with modifications."

The Anglican clergy in the capital were naturally subjected to a strict and more constant surveillance, but even there a surprising degree of freedom obtained. The ejected clergy preached whenever an opportunity was afforded and the Prayer Book was frequently employed. Hacket's house was well known as a meeting place for clergymen, and Cromwell's own daughter attended Hewett's services at St. Gregory's.[5] Both Taylor and Gunning preached occasionally in London,[6] while Farringdon preached in Milk Street with only one interruption.[7] In August 1656 Evelyn heard Dr. Wilde preach in a private house in Fleet Street before a large crowd,[8] and at Christmas in the same year he and his friends partook of the communion at Wilde's lodgings.[9] Just a year later he was present at a communion service held by Dr. Gunning at Exeter House which was interrupted by soldiers. The Government in that year regarded it as necessary to take some action to discourage the open celebration of Christmas by the Anglicans. Meetings were broken up in several places in the city. Those who could identify themselves were immediately released, while some were held at the White-Hart in the Strand "till it shall be known who they are."[1] It was reported that at one service at a church "by Garlick Hill" the Anglicans "had gott some old choirsters and new taught singing boyes, and after the Common Prayer att length in all pontificalibus ended, a young canonicall votary went uppe into the pulpitt, and made an oration or sermon . . . half of itt Latin sentences, and often taking occasion to mencion the name of Jesus, hee duck't even to within the pulpitt, and all the people bowed and cringed as if there had bin masse."[2] Despite the periodic nervousness of the Government, Anglican services were continued and the Christmas festival was widely celebrated in 1658. The Anglican ministry had been well schooled in adversity; the offending Prayer Book was rarely employed but ingenious adaptations were consistently utilized.[3] In May 1658, however, it was reported that the Book of Common Prayer had been openly used in the services at St. Peter's, Paul's Wharf, for years.[4]

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[1] *V.C.H.* (Bedford), I, 342.

[2] *V.C.H.* (Cambridge), II, 94, n.1.

[3] *V.C.H.* (Gloucester), II, 38.

[4] Smith, Harold, *The Ecclesiastical History of Essex under the Long Parliament and Commonwealth* (L., 1933), 338.

[5] Overton, J. H., *Life in the English Church*, 1660–1714 (L., 1885), 3–4.

[6] *V.C.H.* (London), I, 335.

[7] Walker, *Sufferings of the Clergy*, II, 96.

[8] Evelyn, *Diary*, II, 76.

[9] *Ibid.*, II, 81.

Anglicanism laboured under severe disabilities during the Interregnum, but at no time did its burdens assume the proportions of religious persecution. The more zealous and politically minded clergy, as well as the unfit, had suffered grievously, and in some instances worthy and estimable men had been reduced to the direst distress. But the services and continuity of the Church of England had been nobly maintained; the corroding influence of Anglo-Catholicism had been destroyed and repudiated. In the midst of her trials Anglicanism experienced a remarkable revival of thought, and notable efforts were undertaken to define more comprehensively and tolerantly her place in the religious life of England. And above all, the attachment of the bulk of the English nation to the National Church was confirmed and cemented by the devotion of her ministry, by the enlargement of her thought, and by the excesses of the sects which had challenged her predominance in the spiritual life of the nation.

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[1] *Clarke Papers*, III, 130; *Mercurius Politicus*, §396 (December 25, 1657); *V.P.*, January 4, 1658, xxxi, 150.

[2] *Clarke Papers*, III, 130–131.

[3] Churton, E., *Pearson's Minor Works* (L., 1844), xxxi; Tatham, *Puritans in Power*, 225.

[4] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, clxxxi, 19 (May 11, 1658).

6. CROMWELL AND THE SOCINIANS, 1645–1655

The Cromwellian Government had likewise to deal in its religious policy with sectarian communions upon which all the Christian sects of the seventeenth century looked with unmitigated horror as anti-Christian. The Socinians and the Jews should be regarded as groups proscribed by law and outside the scope of the Government's policy of administrative tolerance. None the less, Cromwell dealt with both groups tolerantly and patiently. He probably felt that the universal detestation of the Unitarians provided adequate guarantees against any considerable dissemination of their teachings, while he regarded the Jews with a Puritan logic not unmixed with pious sentiment.

Socinianism was not firmly rooted in England prior to 1640, although Unitarian ideas had been fairly widely dispersed through several channels.[1] But with the collapse of ecclesiastical authority Socinian teachings began to attract isolated knots of radicals in various parts of England and to excite orthodoxy far more than the actual importance of the heresy warranted. In 1643 the violent Cheynell, who had condemned Chillingworth's writings as Socinian, inspired an investigation of Unitarian activities at Oxford which resulted in the expulsion of a scholar named Webberly who had translated several anti-trinitarian tracts. Webberly sought refuge in Holland, where he continued his work and maintained an intermittent correspondence with English sympathizers. A Latin edition of the Racovian Confession appeared in 1651, which was followed by an English translation published in Holland.[2]

As early as 1644 a Unitarian group was meeting regularly in that centre of advanced religious opinions, Coleman Street, London, and shortly afterwards Parliament arraigned before its bar the leading member of the congregation, Paul Best, under charges of heresy.[3] Best was a visionary wholly lacking in the necessary qualities of leadership. It remained for John Biddle and Thomas Lushington to give to the sect an effective organization and a systematic exposition of Unitarian thought.[1] Lushington, who died in 1651, was a professor at Pembroke College, Oxford. The abler Biddle appears to have been converted to Unitarian beliefs by the study of the Bible before he had ever had access to a Socinian treatise. In 1647 he published his *Two-Fold Catechism* and probably a year later *The Apostolical and True Opinion concerning the Trinity*. The latter volume was ordered burned by Parliament, but no action seems to have been taken against the author at this time.[2]

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[1] *Vide* Jordan, W. K., *Development of Religious Toleration in England, etc.*, I (L., 1932), 306–308; II, 430–431.

[2] Bonet-Maury, G., *Des Origines du Christianisme Unitaire chez les Anglais* (Paris, 1881), 231.

[3] *Vide ante*, 88–91.

Biddle was, according to the testimony of his admirers, "without the least blemish in his life and conversation," and a man "full of modesty, sobriety, and forbearance, no ways contentious." He was vastly learned in the scriptures and was reputed to be an excellent Greek scholar. The sect grew rapidly under his energetic leadership. In 1654 it was alleged that Unitarian meetings were being held weekly in London and that the books and pamphlets of the sect enjoyed a large and unhampered circulation.[3] Presbyterian opinion was greatly exercised, and Parliament received numerous demands for the punishment of the leaders of the communion and the suppression of their books.[4]

In late 1654 the House turned its attention to Biddle's activities, largely in order to emphasize forcibly the existence of dangerous heresy and to dramatize its demand that control over damnable error should be retained within its grasp. On December 12th the Socinian was taken into custody and his books, which had been circulated freely, were ordered burned.[5] On the next day, Biddle was examined by the House and was ordered detained in the Gatehouse during the investigations of a committee instructed "to examine the book, to send for the parties and printers, to restrain them, if they see cause, and to suppress his keeping of a school." Biddle, under examination, readily acknowledged the authorship of the book in question, but refused to betray the identity of his printers. His replies to the doctrinal questions of the members were as clear as they

[1] Bonet-Maury, *Des Origines du Christianisme Unitaire*, 232.

[2] *Perfect Diurnall*, September 8, 1647.

[3] *Mercurius Politicus*, October 12, 1654.

[4] Crosby, Thomas, *The History of the English Baptists, etc.* (L., 1738–1740), I, 209.

[5] *Mercurius Politicus*, §235; Burton, *Diary*, I, cxv.

were unsatisfactory and he was remanded to prison until further action should be determined upon.[1]

The House returned to its consideration of the case on January 15th, when it resolved that the "whole drift and scope" of the prisoner's *Two-Fold Catechism* was blasphemous and heretical, casting a reproach "upon all the catechisms now extant."[2] The prisoner was particularly guilty in proposing a blasphemous opinion which he sought to sustain by a wrenching and misapplication of scriptural passages. The committee detected no fewer than thirteen specifically heretical opinions in his *Catechism*, while his *Apostolical and True Opinion concerning the Trinity* was denounced as "full of horrid, blasphemous, and execrable opinions, denying the deity of Christ and of the Holy Ghost." Following the presentation of this report the outraged House instructed its committee to bring in a bill for Biddle's punishment.[3]

The dissolution of Parliament (January 22, 1655) prevented further prosecution of the case. Biddle, presumably acting with advice, petitioned under a writ of *habeas corpus* on February 6, 1655, and the case was transferred to the court of the Upper Bench.[4] The court admitted him to bail and the Government sought to let the incident languish quietly. Unfortunately, however, various sectarian groups with no real sympathy for Biddle's doctrinal views made an issue of the case. It so happened that an ordinance of the Council, issued shortly after Parliament had been dissolved, had severely curtailed the freedom of the press in an effort to drive the malicious and increasingly ribald news-sheets from circulation.[5] Numerous Baptist and Fifth Monarchy pamphleteers immediately charged that the ordinance was connected with the Biddle incident and was calculated to suppress liberty of conscience and freedom of enquiry. The anonymous pamphlet, *The Spirit of Persecution again Broken Loose*, vigorously took up the cudgels for Biddle, and sternly recalled the Government to its devotion to the *Instrument*. A few days later Sturgion's *A Short Discovery of His Highness the Lord Protector's Intentions Touching the Anabaptists in the Army* was, according to Thomason, "scattered about the streetes in the night," demanding complete liberty of expression even for papists and Unitarians.

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[1] *C.J.*, VII, 400.

[2] *Weekly Intelligencer*, §78; Burton, *Diary*, I, cxxix. Biddle had written that all the existing catechisms were so stuffed with the suppositions and traditions of men that the least part of them was derived from the Word of God. (*Two-fold Catechism, Pref.*)

[3] *Ibid.*, §78; Burton, *Diary*, I, cxxx.

[4] *Weekly Intelligencer*, February 13, 1655.

[5] *Orders of His Highness the Lord Protector . . . for putting in speedy and due execution the lawes, statutes, and ordinances, made and provided against printing unlicensed and scandalous books and pamphlets, etc.* (L., 1655). *Cf.* the earlier order of January 7, 1653, reviving the enforcement of the similar legislation of 1649. (Firth and Rait, *Acts and Ordinances*, II, 696–699, 245–254.)

Cromwell's interference in the Biddle case had unquestionably saved the Socinian from serious punishment. The Lord Protector had frequently asserted that blasphemy could not be tolerated in a Christian State, but when pressed to a decision he invariably declined to permit the laws to be rigorously enforced. He had incurred considerable risk of abuse and denunciation from the orthodox by his handling of the case, and no doubt hoped that Biddle would save the Government from further embarrassment. But within a few months the irrepressible Socinian found himself in even more serious difficulties. A Baptist controversialist named Griffin had challenged him to a public disputation on the tender subject of the divinity of Christ. The Unitarian rashly accepted the proposal and a large assembly heard the dread question debated on June 28th by the two protagonists. A few days later the council, which had been inundated with complaints, warned the Lord Mayor to suppress all such meetings in the future.[1] Biddle was promptly arrested and thrown into jail on the complaint of the Presbyterian booksellers, Thomas Underhill, Luke Fawne, and Nathaniel Webb.[2] On July 7th a number of Biddle's friends enquired of the Lord Mayor concerning the charges filed against him and offered bail to secure his release. The mayor revealed that the heretic was detained by express orders from the council, and during an informal hearing Biddle was informed that he would be tried under the Blasphemy Act.[3] Bail was refused by the council, and Biddle's friends demanded that definite charges be filed and that he be formally committed to prison.

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[1] *The Faithful Scout*, July 5, 1655; *Perfect Passages*, §301.

[2] *The spirit of persecution again broken loose, etc.* (L., 1655), 2.

[3] *Ibid.*, 3.

He was accordingly arraigned for violation of the Blasphemy Act on the specific charge of "publickly denying, that Jesus Christ was the Almighty or Most High God."[1] Numerous petitions were addressed to the Lord Protector maintaining that Biddle's imprisonment was a flagrant violation of the *Instrument*, while the author of *The Spirit of Persecution again Broken Loose* demanded: "What hath my Lord Protector gone thorough, [*sic*] fire and water? The greatest difficulties that can be imagined for the sake of liberty of religion, which he calls a natural light, hath he not made this superceed all laws, and constitutions whatsoever in this land, in opposition to such men as these, and will he now give all away into their hands?" Meanwhile Biddle had based his defence squarely upon the *Instrument of Government* which Cromwell had so recently preserved against the assaults of orthodoxy[2]

Cromwell took these complaints seriously, though it was generally understood that the *Instrument* specifically excluded Socinians from the protection of the law. He received the petitioners graciously, spending some time with them debating the case against Biddle on the grounds of scripture. He reiterated his intention to preserve liberty of conscience from the assaults of intolerance, but so long as he was charged with the responsibilities of government religious toleration would never be "stretched so farr as to countenance them who denie the divinity of our Saviour, or to bolster up any blasphemous opinions contrary to the fundamentall verities of religion."[3] But Cromwell had no desire to provide Unitarianism with a martyr, and no inclination whatever to permit a man, however blasphemous, to be severely punished for a purely spiritual opinion. The case was accordingly removed from the jurisdiction of the courts and on October 5, 1655, Biddle was sent by administrative decree to the Scilly Isles under the custody of the governor.[4] Biddle left his London followers under the leadership of John Knowles, who likewise was soon in jail, and Nathanial Stuckey, who continued the publication of the leader's treatises and carried on missionary activities in the capital without conspicuous success.[1]

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[1] *The spirit of persecution again broken loose, etc.*, 5.

[2] *H.M.C., Reports*, V, 176.

[3] *Mercurius Politicus*, September 22, 1655; *Clarke Papers*, III, 53.

[4] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, ci, 18; *Mercurius Politicus*, §278.

7. CROMWELL AND THE JEWS, 1645–1658

The Unitarians were perhaps the most bitterly hated religious group in seventeenth-century England. Their antecedents were Christian, and Unitarian thought appeared to the orthodox mind to be a malicious and blasphemous perversion of the sacred scriptures. They were regarded as unchristian, a sin which they magnified by seeking to identify themselves with the Christian tradition. Somewhat different problems were presented by the Jews, another unchristian group, and a large section of English thought was to address itself to the Jewish problem with singular enthusiasm, not unmixed with naïveté, during the Cromwellian period.

The Jews had been legally excluded from England since the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the seventeenth century relatively little was known about their customs or their history since the biblical period. A combination of diverse influences focused English attention during several years upon a serious proposal to readmit the Jews to the protection of the law with adequate guarantees for freedom of religious worship. Calvinism, perhaps more than any other of the historical Christian communions, had based its conception of church discipline and organization upon the pious examples afforded by the Old Testament. This fact had resulted in a profound revival of interest in the study of the Old Testament and of Hebrew history. Calvinism was likewise militantly evangelical and the survival of the unconverted core of Judaism, despite the scriptural prophecy of its ultimate reduction before Christianity, served as a constant stimulus and challenge. The Jews were principally scattered in Roman Catholic lands where the baleful influence of popery made their conversion to the true faith unlikely, and the possibility of admitting them to England in order to win them to Christianity by the power of the Word found strong support in the Puritan mind and conscience. Then, too, the enlarging body of public opinion which was devoted to complete religious liberty supported enthusiastically the removal of the existing disabilities which smacked so strongly of religious persecution. Cromwell's mind mirrored accurately the sectarian thought of his age, and he was by no means unimpressed by these influences. Quite as important in his view, however, was an exaggerated conviction that the Jews, if they were given a tolerable legal status in England, would greatly assist in the economic rehabilitation of the nation and in the expansion of its trade. We shall now examine briefly the development of these influences which were to result in the negotiations for the readmission of the Jews in 1655.

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[1] Bonet-Maury, *Des Origines du Christianisme Unitaire*, 238.

Hebrew scholarship in England had its initial and most fruitful development in the seventeenth century. Oxford was properly regarded in 1640 as one of the great centres of Hebraic scholarship. Lightfoot, Thorndike, Walton, and Selden had been pioneers in Hebrew scholarship, mastering the language and establishing an intimate connection with the learned Jews on the continent. In 1647 Parliament had demonstrated its interest by voting a grant of £500 to purchase the Hebrew library of Thomason, the great collector.[1] Not fewer than nine Hebrew grammars were published between 1648 and 1653, indicating a widespread popular interest in Jewish history and literature. The leading Hebraists had for some time maintained an intimate correspondence on diverse matters of mutual scholarly interest with the great Dutch Jewish scholar, Menasseh Ben Israel, who was later to represent Judaism in conversations with the Government. Indeed, Menasseh later wrote that the "communication and correspondence I have held, for some yeares since, with some eminent persons of England, was the first originall of my undertaking this design."[2] The Puritan interest in Judaism had developed steadily during the disturbed days of the Civil War, and as Puritanism dissolved into sectarianism this concern became increasingly enthusiastic and naïve. We have frequently commented upon the wide dispersion of millenarian convictions amongst the sectaries, and the millenarian argument had it that the conversion of the Jews and the destruction of popery were the two prime prerequisites to the return of Christ. These pious yearnings became hopelessly confused with the messianism which was then sweeping Judaism, resulting in numerous attempts on the part of English pamphleteers to prove that the American Indians were the lost tribes of Israel, and powerfully implementing the interest in the readmission of the Jews.

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[1] *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, March 28, April 4, 1648.

[2] Menasseh Ben Israel, *Vindiciae Judaeorum, etc.* (L., 1656), 37.

As early as 1643 rumours of this sectarian preoccupation reached the royalist camp. A correspondent charged that "It is whispered that the Jews in several places and countries have several times made diverse overtures to help the republicans . . . to carry on their designs, provided that . . . as soon as they shall have effected the change of the government, the Jews might have full liberty not only to exercise their religion" but to settle in England.[1] A few Jewish traders were already resident in London under the protection of Parliament, and a number of cases had been reported, principally in untrustworthy royalist news-sheets, of sectaries who had embraced Judaism. In early 1648 a woman had been indicted for the offence of declaring herself a Jewess and for having her children circumcised. The court ordered her to be taken before the Assembly of Divines for instruction and correction. A committee of the Assembly reasoned unsuccessfully with the prisoner, delivering her back to the court as a confirmed apostate. The court declined to take further cognizance of the case, it "being merely ecclesiasticall," and ordered the prisoner to be released from custody.[2]

The rather vague discussion of the Jewish problem began to crystallize in the early days of the Commonwealth into definite proposals for their readmission into England with full liberty of conscience. In January 1649 the army council entertained a petition from two English sectaries resident in Holland asking for the "repeal of an act of parliament" banishing the Jews and requesting that they "may again be received and permitted to dwell and trade amongst you in this land, as now they do in the Netherlands." There was, at this time, widespread sympathy in the army for the Jews,[3] and the council promised to take the substance of the petition "into speedy consideration when the present more publike affairs are dissipated." At about the same time William Erbury, preaching in London, declared that "no purpose would be effected in allowing the Jews to come back to England, if [they were] not given the right to exercise their religion." In February of the same year Nicholas's able *An Apology for the Honourable Nation of the Jews* appeared. This work, which was to enjoy a wide circulation and influence, argued manfully that the grossest of the sins of England had been the banishment and proscription of the chosen people of God.[1] Instead of retaining "a grateful remembrance of these people of God," England had for centuries refused even to admit them to dwell within her frontiers. Those who persecute the Jews hold them guilty of the crucifixion of Christ, but this awful sin was in fact perpetrated by the priestly caste and not by the Jewish nation.[2] England must consider her course carefully lest by "putting from us and abandoning these people of God, we separate not ourselves from Gods favor and protection . . . . It is not tollerable even amongst moral men . . . to adde affliction to the afflicted, as we do in continuing laws in force against them."[3] The Jews have been treated barbarously and inhumanely in other lands. Now that England has destroyed the tyranny of persecution she must extend to the Jewish nation a refuge until the promised day of its conversion. This argument was further developed by John Sadler in the *Rights of the Kingdom*. Sadler declared that the persecution of the Jews must be regarded as the greatest blemish upon Christianity. He reminded England of the vast learning and deep piety of Jews like Menasseh,[4] and asserted that the religious liberty which had been won in England would be tested by the attitude of the people towards this persecuted race.

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[1] *H.M.C., Reports*, VII, *App., pt.* i, 401.

[2] *Middlesex Records*, III, 186.

[3] *Thurloe Papers*, III, 308 (December 12, 1655).

Powerful and highly influential men like Peters, Goodwin, and Williams were lending their support to the demand that formal action should be taken for the toleration of Judaism. Fantastic rumours of concessions which were about to be granted were seriously circulated amongst the enemies of the

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[1] Nicholas, Edward, *An apology for the honourable nation of the Jews, and all the sons of Israel* (L., 1649), 4–5.

[2] *Ibid.*, 6.

[3] *Ibid.*, 8.

[4] [Sadler, J.], *Rights of the Kingdom, etc.* (L., 1649) (shaved, no pagin.).

Government. A persistent report had it that the Jews were to be admitted upon the payment of a huge subsidy, and that St. Paul's was to be given over to them for their synagogue and the Oxford library for their scholars.[1]

No doubt seems to have assailed the sectarian mind that the Jews might prove obdurate before the persuasions of the godly. The intense evangelical zeal of sectarianism dispelled the fear which orthodox Christianity had always entertained of the contaminating influence of Judaism. The enthusiasm of the advocates of Jewish toleration became, on occasion, almost hysterical. Thus in 1652 the officers of the war-vessel *Phoenix*, who had visited a Jewish synagogue while at Leghorn, wrote: "Surely the promise of Jehovah will be fulfilled, and he will give them favour in all nations and that England will not be slack therein. Shall they be tolerated by the pope, and by the Turk, and shall England still have laws in force against them. O, that the poor Jews might have a toleration to come into England out of here, that they may be succored in that terrible day."[2] The high point of sectarian interest in the plight of the Jews was attained during the session of the Nominated Parliament. A member, Samuel Herring, resolved that "the Jewes should be called into this Commonwealth, and have places allotted to them to inhabit in, and exercise their lyberty, for there tyme is neere at hand."[3] The Parliament gave brief but serious consideration to the motion, though it was apparently never formalized as a bill. The high duty of converting the Jews was urged upon the members,[4] while more realistic speakers stressed the great economic advantages which would accrue to England if they were permitted to dwell in the land.[5]

Even prior to this period of agitation a small number of Jews had taken refuge in England. Indeed, as early as 1609 a few Jewish merchants, posing as Portuguese, had been expelled from the realm.[6] It was not until the outbreak of the Civil War that they were able to settle in England under anything like tolerable conditions. In 1643 the usually trustworthy Venetian envoy reported that the Parliamentary Government had permitted several Dutch Jews to settle in London on condition that they purchase properties which had been confiscated for delinquent taxes.[1] The large bullion stores possessed by Jewish merchants who had participated in Spanish or Portuguese trade exercised a fatal fascination on the hard-pressed and mercantilist Government. Thus a very rich Jewish merchant named Carvajal was befriended by the authorities, was protected by the House of Lords against the reports of an informer,[2] and in 1649 was permitted to participate in a syndicate underwriting a large army contract. A year later his property was specifically protected by an order of the council. Carvajal was eminently successful in establishing a large overseas business, expanding England's trade with Spain and the Americas while adding considerably to the depleted bullion stores of the nation.[3] Other merchants had followed him, and a synagogue had apparently been established in Creechurch Lane where services were discreetly conducted with the connivance of the Government.

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[1] Walker, Clement, *Anarchia Anglicana: or, the history of Independency, etc.* (L., 1648), II, 60; Carte, *A Collection of Original Letters and Papers*, I, 276.

[2] *Jewish Historical Society, Transactions*, IV, 196.

[3] Nickolls, *Original Letters and Papers of State*, 100.

[4] *Thurloe Papers*, I, 387 (July 29, 1653).

[5] *Clarendon State Papers*, II, §1294.

[6] *V.P.*, August 20, 1609, xi, 320.

Cromwell's Jewish policy appears to have been based squarely upon the developments which we have sketched. He was not uninfluenced by the evangelical and millenarian preoccupations of the sectaries, and as a consistently tolerant statesman he was not without sympathy for the plight of the Jews in Spain and Portugal. The Jews had lent Parliament valuable services during the Civil Wars, and during the Spanish War were greatly to assist the Protectorate as intelligencers and advisers. Cromwell felt no personal animosity towards them and held in the highest regard several of their leaders. Even more important, however, was his conviction that the admission of the Jews would considerably increase England's foreign trade, augment the bullion stock, and add a prosperous and industrious merchant class solidly devoted to the Government. Burnet felt that Cromwell had been almost solely influenced by this consideration: "When he understood what dealers the Jews were every where in that trade that depends on news, the advancing money upon high or low interests in proportion to the risque they run or the gain to be made as the times might turn, and in the buying and selling of the actions of money so advanced," the Protector was prepared to welcome them into England with the promise of religious toleration.[1] This view ignores Cromwell's genuinely tolerant interest in the Jewish problem, but it certainly emphasizes the decisive considerations in the Protector's mind.

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[1] *V.P.*, March 13, 1643, xxvi, 252.

[2] See *J.H.S.*, *Transactions*, II, 14 ff., for an excellent discussion of his career.

[3] James, Margaret, *Social Problems and Policy during the Puritan Revolution*, 1640–1660 (L., 1930), 189; *J.H.S.*, *Transactions*, II, 18, 26.

Cromwell was particularly concerned because of the competitive gains which the Dutch had made in export trade during the period when civil war had paralysed English commerce. The Jews appeared to him to afford the ability and to provide the capital essential for recouping former losses and making new gains. In considering the uses to which Dunkirk was to be put when it came into English hands it was proposed to permit a "tolleration of a synagogue for the Jews" there, for which they would pay from £60,000 to £80,000, in order to attract Jewish traders from Amsterdam.[2] The Dutch were thoroughly alarmed, fearing a wholesale exodus of capital, and Menasseh had personally to assure the States that the Jews would not forget the past favours of Holland. The passage of the Navigation Act almost ruined numerous Jewish merchants who had been engaged in the lucrative English trade and further stimulated the plans for establishing a Jewish colony in England which had for some time been unfolding in Menasseh's mind. The Jewish leader addressed an urgent communication to the council, which, after some delay, forwarded a pass for his safe conduct to appear in London before it.[3] Menasseh did not immediately come to England; his mission was postponed by the outbreak of the Anglo-Dutch war and by a severe illness. But his rather dreamy nature was galvanized into action when the recapture of the Brazilian port towns by the Portuguese resulted in a bitter persecution of the prosperous Dutch Jews who had settled there, many of whom subsequently found refuge in the English colonies in North America.

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[1] Burnet, Gilbert, *History of his own times, etc.* (L., 1724–1734), I, 71.

[2] Gardiner, S. R., *English Historical Review*, July, 1896, p. 485.

[3] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, xxvi, 35 (December 17, 1652).

In September 1655, Menasseh set out for England to lay his proposals before the Government. All the elements of a complete misunderstanding were present. The English knew little concerning the state of Jewry on the continent. The few Jews in England had been prosperous merchants who had contributed notably to the economic rehabilitation of the nation, and the Government laboured under the delusion, which has never quite disappeared, that all Jews were wealthy and astute in finance and trade. At least, the Government was interested only in the settlement of Jews of this class. Menasseh, on the other hand, was concerned principally with the miserable plight of the thousands of destitute and persecuted Jews who would for a generation at least constitute an economic liability to any nation receiving them. Menasseh had dealt principally with religious and scholarly enthusiasts in England and was quite unaware of the economic considerations which weighed so heavily with the Lord Protector. Before leaving he had addressed a letter to European Jewry explaining his high purposes: "I have been informed by letters, and by faithful correspondents, that today this English nation is no longer our ancient enemy, but has changed the papistical religion and become excellently affected to our nation."[1]

Events in England lent considerable hope to his plans. War with Spain was looming, and the Iberian Jews were enthusiastically offering themselves for services of great value to a Government without geographical or economic knowledge of the Spanish colonial possessions which it proposed to seize.[2] In August the respected Caravajal had been granted letters of denization by the Protector. Menasseh prepared the way for his audience with the council by publishing on November 5th his *Humble Address*. In these memoranda the Jewish scholar displayed a remarkable knowledge of the English temper by appealing directly to all the forces favourable to the Jews. He pointed out that the Jews had assisted every nation that had treated them well. He sketched convincingly the great contributions which the Jews could make to the economic life of England as traders and bankers. Then, too, England was the only country which formally excluded his race and its reestablishment there would, according to the prophecies, be a prelude to the coming of the Messiah.[1] Some days later he addressed a formal petition to the Council in which he pleaded for the readmission of the Jews as citizens under the Lord Protector's care. He asked for the repeal of all laws in force against the Jewish nation in order that they might live in peace and security as Englishmen. And finally, he asked that they be given liberty to exercise their religion in public synagogues and to bury their dead in a cemetery which might be located discreetly outside the city.[2]

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[1] *J.H.S., Transactions*, XI, 116.

[2] See *Thurloe Papers*, IV, 61–62, for the plan of Simon de Caceres.

The council either regarded itself as without capacity to deal with so delicate a problem or was indisposed to accept responsibility. It accordingly advised the Lord Protector to delegate authority to a committee of councillors who should arrange a public conference for a consideration of the problem. Cromwell immediately named Lisle, Wolsley, Pickering, and Lawrence, who were instructed to canvass the opinions of such judges, ministers, and merchants as might have informed views.[3]

Several hearings were held by the committee during December, 1655. It was evident from the outset that the council was not in agreement and that there was a strong sentiment amongst the clergy and merchants against the admission of the Jews. Several preachers argued that severe restrictions would be necessary and that they would certainly be disregarded by the Jews.[4] The more tolerantly disposed recalled the charitable policy of the Government, urged the high necessity of fulfilling scriptural prophecies, and reminded the conference of the desperate state of the Jews in numerous Catholic countries.[5] The views of this group were considerably strengthened by an opinion of the great justices Steele and Glynne that there was in force no statutory provision excluding the Jews, and that the whole question was one of administrative expediency. Those favourably inclined accordingly maintained that there was no legal impediment to the return of the Jews under conditions of complete freedom of worship so long as they did not blaspheme Christ. England had been guilty of a vicious persecution of the Jews and the wrath of God should be propitiated by admitting them now.[1] They offered no threat to true religion since their writings and beliefs were so dissimilar to Christianity as to appear ridiculous to the faithful.

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[1] Menasseh Ben Israel, *The humble addresses of Manasseh Ben Israel* (L., 1655).

[2] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, ci, 115 (November 13?, 1655).

[3] *Ibid.*, ci, 128 (November 14, 1655); ci, 133 (November 15, 1655).

[4] [Jessey, Henry], *A narrative of the late proceedings at White-hall, concerning the Jews* (L., 1656); *Harleian Miscellany, etc.* (L., 1744–1746), VII, 580.

[5] *Ibid.*, VII, 580–581.

But the majority opinion was distinctly suspicious and unfavourable. The London merchants, who had for so long constituted the economic foundation of the Protectorate, were completely and vociferously angry at the prospect of Jewish competition. The more orthodox Puritan clergy of the capital had been consulted[2] and had advanced frantic objections to exposing the purity of faith to still another form of blasphemy and unbelief. Indeed, even those favouring readmission were disposed to erect restrictions which would in effect have discouraged immigration. Jessey proposed that they be settled in decayed port towns and required to pay discriminatory customs duties.[3] Even the committee of the council shared this cautious attitude. A rough memorandum, which probably originated in that body, suggested that the Jews might be admitted if proper restrictions and safeguards were taken. The members were not unmindful of the danger to religion, and the suggestion that the Jews should enjoy freedom of public worship was both scandalous and evil. They must be sternly restrained from blasphemy, and should not be permitted to profane the sabbath, to keep English servants, or to print anything in English derogatory to Christianity. Nor should they offer any resistance to the attempts of the clergy to convert them, while, conversely, Jewish proselytizing was to be severely punished.[4]

Cromwell had taken no active part in the deliberations of the conference, apparently hoping that opinion would crystallize favourable to the reception of the Jews under reasonable restrictions. On December 18th he dissolved the conference with a stern rebuke to the clergy for their squabbling and with an intimation that the whole problem would be settled by administration.[1] He indicated that he viewed the question "with indifferency and moderation, as one that desired only to obtain satisfaction in a matter of so high and religious concernment, there being many glorious promises recorded in the holy Scripture concerning the calling and conversion of the Jewes to the faith of Christ."[2] Cromwell was not sufficiently interested in the plight of the Jews to outrage both clerical and commercial opinion and he made no overtures towards the settlement of the Jews in substantial numbers. He did maintain a consistently tolerant attitude towards the Jews already resident in England, however, and their number slowly increased during the closing years of his regime. He assured the Jews that they would be exempted from the pains of the recusancy laws[3] and offered private guarantees that the public worship of their congregations would not be interrupted. Public opinion had been educated and considerably mollified and England was to be the gainer through the almost imperceptible increase of an able Jewish population which was readily and fruitfully absorbed into the cultural and economic life of the nation.

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[1] [Jessey], *Narrative of the late proceedings*, *Harl. Miscl.*, VII, 581.

[2] *The Publicke Intelligencer*, §10 (December 4, 1655).

[3] W., E., *The life and death of Mr. H. Jessey* ([L.?], 1671), 67–68.

[4] *S.P. Dom.*, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, ci, 118.

D. The Struggle to Maintain Religious Toleration, September 1656–September 1658

1. The nayler case and the problem of quakerism, september 1656–september 1658

Cromwell's policy of administrative tolerance under a broad interpretation of the *Instrument of Government* had never been subjected to an unrestrained criticism by Parliament. It will be recalled that the first Parliament under the *Instrument* had been disposed to limit materially the Protector's tolerance and to restrict by definition the comprehensive limits of the National Church which had been created by ordinance. The critical attitude of Parliament towards the governmental religious policy had been kept within bounds by the strenuous exertions of Cromwell, but only a sudden dissolution had prevented a hopeless impasse.[1]

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[1] [Jessey], *Narrative of the late proceedings*, *Harl. Miscl.*, VII, 583; *Mercurius Politicus*, §288.

[2] *Mercurius Politicus*, §289.

[3] Gardiner, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, III, 221.

The second Parliament under the *Instrument* convened in September 1656, and the Government must have viewed with considerable apprehension the intolerant opposition to its religious policy which had been gathering momentum during the previous twenty months. We have observed that the limits of toleration had been broadened to a degree which would have seemed inconceivable a short decade earlier. The Anglicans had been treated generously; the Catholics had been extended large liberties; the Jews and Socinians had been protected; and the strange and fanatical sects which so distressed the Puritan conscience had been treated with tolerable leniency.

In his speech opening Parliament Cromwell addressed himself at the outset to the vigorous defence of his achievements. The Government had extended to men of "whatever pretensions to religion" liberty of worship and freedom of conscience with the understanding that the civil peace must not be disturbed. Its interest had been purely civil, insisting that religion should not mask bloodshed and rebellion. So long as men continue to be "thankful to God and to make use of the liberty given them to enjoy their own consciences," they ought to be not only tolerated but encouraged. The Government had been guided by a broad and charitable conception of religion. All men who adhere to a simple faith in Jesus Christ are truly religious. "Whoever hath this faith, let his form be what it will; he walking peaceably, without the prejudicing of others under another form," has been and will be permitted full liberty of conscience. It is the task of government to ensure these benefits and to prevent one faith from tyrannously imposing itself upon others. Cromwell declared that he had been accused by some of favouring presbytery and by others of encouraging heresy. But he was content. "I have borne my reproach: but I have, through God's mercy, not been unhappy in preventing any one religion to impose upon another." For it is the function of magistracy to keep all "the professing Christians in this relation to one another; and not to suffer any to say or do what will justly provoke the others."[1]

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[1] *Vide ante*, 160–170.

This statement of religious policy was addressed to a body which represented a public opinion far more conservative than the ever-enlarging views of Cromwell. The Parliament was moderately Presbyterian in its sympathies, while the Independents reflected the growing conservatism of Congregationalism, which now exhibited the characteristics of a dominant religious communion. The conservative complexion of Parliament persisted despite the fact that the council, after carefully scrutinizing the election returns, had excluded out of hand almost 100 of the 460 members as enemies of the Government. Moreover, somewhat more than 50 additional members voluntarily withdrew in protest against the arbitrary action of the council.[2] Parliament turned immediately to an indirect but extremely serious attack upon the more unpopular aspects of the Government's policy of toleration, feeling its way towards the amendment of the large tolerance guaranteed by the *Instrument* by savagely concentrating upon the Roman Catholics and the Quakers, distaste for whom characterized all of the Presbyterians and most of the Independents.

In another connection we have observed that this Parliament passed by a majority of two to one, despite the passive resistance of the Government, an effective and reasonably severe recusancy act calculated to check the spread of Romanism and seriously to impede the exercise of Roman Catholic worship.[3] The majority of leaders in Parliament felt that the Government's policy towards the Quakers could likewise be successfully attacked. The sect was spreading rapidly; its excesses were a public scandal; it was almost universally feared and detested; Cromwell would consequently find it exceedingly difficult to object, save by oblique representations, to such measures as should be taken to secure either its restraint or its extirpation. The legal provisions required for the punishment of such monstrous error were by no means clear, largely because

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[1] Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, II, 535–537.

[2] *Thurloe Papers*, V, 453; *et cf. S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, cxxx, 31.

[1] *Vide ante*, 184 ff., for a discussion of anti-Catholic legislation during the Protectorate.

Cromwell had deliberately declined to define them or to permit the courts to elaborate a system of punishment by judicial interpretation. The Blasphemy Act of 1648 had never been specifically repealed but it seemed probable that it had been abrogated by the act of August 1650, passed by the Independents, prescribing less harsh penalties for specified "atheistic and blasphemous" opinions. Biddle had been indicted under this ordinance but his case had been taken out of the jurisdiction of the courts by the direct, and probably illegal, intervention of the Protector. At about the same time certain justices in Kent had committed one Richard Coppin on charges of "preaching and maintaining several blasphemous tenets, saying Christ's human nature was defiled with sin, and that he offered sacrifice for his own sin as well as for the peoples; and that all men should be saved, denying hell or heaven to be other than what was within him, and many such damnable tenets." It seems probable that the Government intervened in the Coppin case or that the lower courts felt unable to indict under any existing laws, since Coppin was held in prison for several months without trial.

Orthodox religious opinion had been scandalized by the unwillingness of the Government to press heresy charges against most flagrant offenders and by the inability of the courts, even when favourably disposed, to proceed vigorously because of the uncertainty and confusion of the laws which the Government had nullified by inaction. Parliament could congratulate itself upon having partially remedied this laxity by the passage of very precise legislation against recusancy, basing its action upon traditional statutory precedent. In the famous Nayler case it sought to extend its coercive and regulatory power to the restraint of grievous blasphemy and error which could not be condemned as Romanist. The Government appreciated the gravity of the issue and opposed the orthodox fury of Parliament with every agency and stratagem within its command. The Nayler case was consequently of very great importance in the development of religious toleration. Cromwell's policy of administrative tolerance was tested before the bar of parliamentary opinion in the defence of a notorious and obviously mad blasphemer whose actions and views offended deeply the instincts of all religious men. No severer test for the principle of religious toleration could have been devised by a satanic mind. The issue was squarely joined in a case involving patent and flagrant blasphemy, and the impassioned debates which absorbed Parliament for so many weeks afford an intimate and revealing insight into the temper of a substantial and responsible body of public opinion on the broad question of religious liberty.

James Nayler was one of Fox's early converts. After having served with some distinction in Lambert's regiment during the war, Nayler left the army in 1652 to begin his career as a preacher. He was described by contemporaries as a man of striking appearance who spoke and wrote with a peculiarly florid eloquence and who possessed a fatal fascination for women. His followers soon began to treat him with a veneration which Nayler apparently encouraged by referring to himself as the "Sun of Righteousness, the Prince of Peace, the only Begotten, the fairest of ten thousand," and similar terms suggesting divinity.[1] He was soon seized with messianic and mystical delusions which were expressed in a strange confusion of teachings embracing ideas from most of the fantastic sects of the period. The more responsible Quaker leaders were greatly perturbed by the development of his obsessions. Nayler was thrown into jail at Exeter for a few weeks in the summer of 1656, where Fox visited him to remonstrate with the deluded man about his "imaginations."[2] The sober Hubberthorn wrote that the "power of darkness in the women rules over him. . . . My heart was made to pity his condition."[3] But the adjurations of his friends were without effect. Upon his release from jail Nayler journeyed to Bristol, where his followers arranged a triumphal procession which was a blasphemous parody upon Christ's entrance into Jerusalem.[4] He was immediately arrested by the local authorities and it was testified in the preliminary hearings that he had been worshipped as the Lamb of God.

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[1] Price, Thomas, *The History of Protestant Nonconformity in England, etc.* (L., 1836–1838), II, 519.

[2] Fox, George, *The Journal of George Fox* (ed. by Norman Penney) (Cambridge, 1911), I, 243, 244, 246.

[3] Quoted by Brockbank, Elisabeth, *Richard Hubberthorne of Yealand, Yeoman, Soldier, Quaker*, 1628–1662 (L., 1929), 93.

[4] *Mercurius Politicus*, §334, §336; *Publicke Intelligencer*, §61.

One devoted woman confessed that she ought to fall down and worship him since he was her "Lord, Lord of righteousnes and prince of peace, and anointed king of Israel by a prophet." Another female follower declared that he was Jesus, while a third held that he was "the Holy One of Israel," whom the spirit within her commanded to call Lord and Master and to serve since he had raised her from the dead at Exeter jail.[1] The local authorities did not feel competent to deal with so grave and bizarre a case and shortly afterwards the obviously demented Quaker was committed to prison in London.[2]

The Nayler case supplied Parliament with precisely the lever needed to bring an irresistible pressure upon the Lord Protector. Nayler's blasphemy was universally admitted and condemned, and public opinion was feverishly exercised by the news-sheets, lampoons, and pamphlets which described the Bristol incident in lurid detail. Parliament immediately asserted its jurisdiction in the case, calling for a full report from the Bristol magistrate on the particulars and the testimony obtained in the preliminary hearing.[3] A parliamentary committee, under the presidency of Bampfield, was appointed to sift the evidence, and after numerous hearings reported out to the House on December 5, 1656.[4] The committee charged that Nayler had assumed "the gestures, words, names, and attributes of our Saviour Christ." Upon this allegation the subsequent proceedings, which were to occupy Parliament almost exclusively for weeks, were based. Nayler was by his own admission guilty of blasphemies which every member of the House regarded as heinous and there was no opposition to the formal resolution maintaining that "James Nayler upon the whole matter in fact is guilty of horrid blasphemy" and was a "grand impostor, and a great seducer of the people."[5] The amazing debate which followed was concerned with what punishment the Christian State could and should impose upon the most hideous of all religious errors.

The conservative majority was from the first determined to punish Nayler by death and to exploit the case in order to drive through effective legislation for the restraint of heresy and gross blasphemy. The survival of orthodox Calvinistic theory concerning the necessity for the extirpation of error by the godly state was most plainly evidenced in the arguments of these members. Skippon, who led the debate for the orthodox majority, expressed the view that the growth of blasphemy "is more dangerous than the most intestine or foreign enemies. I have often been troubled in my thoughts to think of this toleration. . . . Shall we suffer our Lord Jesus thus to be abused and trampled upon?" No imposition should be laid upon the religious conscience, but grievous error cannot be left unpunished.[1] Skippon's colleague, General Boteler, supported him, reminding the members that the Mosaic law demanded death in expiation of blasphemy. Toleration is not thereby endangered, for surely "it is not intended to indulge such grown heresies and blasphemers as these, under the notion of a toleration of tender consciences."[2]

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[1] *Mercurius Politicus*, §340 (December 11–December 18, 1656).

[2] *Ibid.*, §334 (November 14, 1656).

[3] Fogelklou, Emilia, *James Nayler, the Rebel Saint* (L., 1931), 191.

[4] *C.J.*, VII, 448, 464; *Mercurius Politicus*, §339.

[5] *Mercurius Politicus*, §339 (December 8, 1656).

The real interest of the Presbyterians in the case was revealed at the opening of the debate on December 6th when Colonel Cox urged that such offences would continue to plague the nation until effective legislation had been provided for the restraint of error. "The eyes of all the nation are upon you for this issue. The world abroad says it is liberty of conscience has brought this fellow before you. I am of the same opinion."[3] The Presbyterians were to impale themselves upon the horns of their own intolerant enthusiasm. They argued hysterically for the death penalty for Nayler, while maintaining at the same time that the case had been made possible because of the absence of effective statutory regulations. The Government party, which was struggling desperately to save Nayler from death, was to drive this barb deep into the majority before the debates were concluded. The conservatives sought to protect themselves from this inconsistency by establishing first the extreme nature of Nayler's offence and then by forcing through summary legislation for his punishment.

For nine days a violent debate, in which more than half the members spoke, raged over the insoluble question of spiritual

[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 24–25. [2] *Ibid.*, I, 26–27. [3] *Ibid.*, I, 38.

error and its correction, the blunt and unskilful Skippon goading on the orthodox. He charged that this and other horrible excesses of the Quakers, Ranters, Levellers, and Socinians were the fruit of the unreasonable and impious freedom to heresy afforded by the *Instrument*, which at one blow destroyed all the restraints so carefully erected by the pious to guard the purity of faith. If the toleration of such heresies constitutes liberty, England does not want liberty.[1] Another member supported him, suggesting, "let us all stop our ears, and stone him,—for he is guilty of horrid blasphemy."[2] "We hang men for stealing a shilling," Judge Smith reminded the House, "yet we make nothing of robbing God of his glory."[3] Colonel Milton, who feared that the Machiavellian tactics of the Government's spokesmen might be directed towards arranging some light punishment as a compromise, alleged that this would be comparable to "condemning a man for high treason, and punishing him with the pillory." He therefore demanded that "a bill of attainder may be brought in, not with a blank but with a full, punishment, that is, death."[4] This view obtained the warm support of Drake[5] and Goffe, the latter declaring that he was greatly disturbed by the Government's contention that there was no law prescribing the death penalty for blasphemy. Christ is the king of England and His honour must be maintained. Goffe declared his reverence for the *Instrument*, for which he said he would willingly shed his blood, "yet if it hold out any thing to protect such persons I would have it burnt in the fire."[6]

The conservatives had developed this position with tolerable fulness and clarity during the debates of the first five days of the session. They had established the fact of Nayler's blasphemy, had demanded his punishment by death, had urged the high necessity of passing stringent legislation for the extirpation of heresy and error, and had come dangerously close to renouncing the religious clause of the *Instrument*, upon which they felt sure the moderates would base their plea for leniency.

The moderates during the opening days of the debates were content with allowing the Presbyterians to expose the legal and logical flaws in their zealous position before selecting a ground for defence. On December 6th they brought Nayler into the House for direct examination in the hope that the defendant would appear less blasphemous than the committee's report indicated, or at least that he would exhibit a penitent disposition. But no moderate party ever had a more difficult case to defend; Nayler seemed determined to hang himself. He confessed to all of the committee's charges against him, and outraged the House by the personal admission of facts and beliefs which the formal charge had made appear somewhat less than blasphemous. The Quaker was plainly unbalanced, though this would scarcely have constituted a satisfactory plea in seventeenth-century England. The moderates were therefore unable to make any personal defence of Nayler. They now sought to save him by the maintenance of the abstract grounds of religious toleration and by exploring the legal and procedural weaknesses in the Presbyterian position. At the same time Lawrence and the other Government spokesmen constantly interrupted debate when the temper and zeal of the orthodox grew too hot by motions for adjournment, seeking by parliamentary manœuvres to circumvent a vote on the death penalty.[1] The moderate members, under extremely difficult circumstances, lent to the principle of religious toleration a vigorous and reasoned support. The fact that so many responsible men could argue so nobly and so objectively in the defence of a notorious blasphemer indicates that England under the leadership of Cromwell and the sects had advanced very far indeed on the road towards religious toleration.

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 50.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 75.

[3] *Ibid.*, I, 87.

[4] *Ibid.*, I, 96.

[5] *Ibid.*, I, 107–108.

[6] *Ibid.*, I, 108–110.

Desborough warned the Presbyterians that they were bandying the term blasphemy about so loosely and carelessly as to endanger the lives of many sinful men. Actually those who worshipped Nayler were more guilty than he. Nayler was unquestionably a great sinner, but he was certainly not a "horrid blasphemer," a term which he challenged the orthodox to cite from the scriptures.[2] Strickland argued to the same point. He reminded Parliament that Nayler had never called himself Christ—his followers had done that. He charged that the orthodox party was twisting the meaning of blasphemy to its own end. Nayler was obviously a seducer who should be rendered harmless by transportation to the Scilly Isles.[1] Captain Baynes followed Strickland to condemn those members who seemed quite prepared to convict a man of "horrid blasphemy" when they could adduce no law for its punishment. The case would obviously have to be referred to the Lord Protector, who, however much he might be troubled by the Quaker's offence, would have to be guided by the *Instrument*. And the *Instrument*, he reminded the House, expressly extended protection to all "that profess faith in Jesus Christ, which, I suppose, this man does."[2]

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[1] *Vide* Burton, *Diary*, I, 50, 51, 52, *et passim*, for examples.

[2] Burton, *Diary*, I, 55.

Lawrence, who skilfully directed the debates for the moderate party, advanced arguments which a generation previously might have brought the speaker before an ecclesiastical court in defence of his own life. He warned the orthodox that it was by no means easy to arrive at truth in cases involving alleged error. Nayler claimed to be Christ. In a sense this might be true, for "is not God in every horse, in every stone, in every creature." If Parliament hangs every man who says, "'Christ is in you the hope of glory,' you will hang a good many. You shall hear this in every man's mouth of that sect, and others too, that challenge a great interest in Christ."[3] Lawrence admitted that Nayler was a heretic, but blasphemy had not been proved against him. Pickering supported Lawrence, reasoning that Nayler had not meant in a literal sense to say that he was Christ. The man should be punished, "but to give my vote for blood I shall be very tender in it. Haply, some will say I am fallen from the faith. I speak my conscience, the will of God be done in it."[4] The dangerously sophistic view that Nayler had really meant to say that he was "filled with the spirit of Christ" rather than that he was actually Christ received still further development. Highland ventured the interesting suggestion that Nayler simply claimed that he had more of Christ in him than had any other person. He had consequently been guilty of a spiritual arrogance meriting some punishment, but certainly not death.[5] Colonel Sydenham was genuinely alarmed. Nayler, he felt, was on the verge of pronouncing a great truth when he emphasized, no doubt unduly, the presence of the indwelling Spirit. To punish such a man with death would be to rear up a dangerous precedent. The speaker submitted that earlier parliaments "would condemn most of us for hereticks," and "who can tell what may be the spirit or temper of other parliaments?"[1]

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 57.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 59.

[3] *Ibid.*, I, 62.

[4] *Ibid.*, I, 65.

[5] *Ibid.*, I, 67.

Desborough altered the drift of the moderates' argument by recalling to the members the prophecy that false Christs would arise. But the scripture passes no judgment upon them. We are simply commanded to avoid these men.[2] Bodurda, following him, declared himself to be completely unimpressed by the orthodox arguments. He knew of no reason for assuming that Nayler was either heretical or blasphemous. He had not been reasoned with and "his riding into Exeter was a horrid piece of pageantry and impostery, but how to call that blasphemy in him I know not."[3] And even if blasphemy could be proved, Desborough added, the orthodox party had exhibited amazing and alarming confusion. The statute of 1650, which alone could be alleged to apply to this case, provided a penalty of six months in prison for such offences. The members were, therefore, in fact demanding the death penalty upon a charge which existing statutes did not punish with infallible severity.

Colonel Clarke was the first member in the long and heated dispute to suggest the obvious thesis that Nayler was mad, lying "under a very high delusion, strong and devillish delusion, that has tossed him up and down in the world." Nayler, he submitted, should be dismissed as an impostor.[4] General Howard took a more serious view, holding that Nayler was a self-confessed heretic, but certainly not a blasphemer. The astute and gifted Waller raked the Presbyterian position with the fire of bitter irony. He demanded that the godly first define blasphemy and then state what the punishment should be. "I am for the moderater title, that he is a great impostor, and a seducer. This will fully bear your witness against it. I incline to the moderate way, lest you open such a vein of blood as you will scarcely close."[5] This reasoned argument received the enthusiastic support of Colonel Holland, who summoned the members to consider the "state of this nation, what the price of our blood is. Liberty of conscience, the *Instrument* gives it to us. We remember how many Christians were formerly martyred under this notion of blasphemy; and who can define what it is."

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 69.
[2] *Ibid.*, I, 71.
[3] *Ibid.*, I, 72.
[4] *Ibid.*, I, 75–76.
[5] *Ibid.*, I, 78.

Sydenham opened the debate on December 9th with a shift of emphasis which would probably indicate that the supporters of the Government had been in caucus during the previous night. He declared that the orthodox party urged in fact that Nayler's life should be taken by a retroactive procedure. Consequently, if Nayler is guilty, all the Quakers must submit to the same punishment. The member, for his own part, had found much good in the sect. Indeed, "the opinions they hold, do border so near a glorious truth, that I cannot pass my judgment that it is blasphemy. I shall choose rather to live in another nation."[1] Strickland rose to support the previous speaker. Nayler's offence was punishable by death under no existing law. Those members who demanded his life must then desire to proceed by "punishment by act" and Parliament must beware of that recourse. "Heresies are like leaden pipes under ground. They run on still, though we do not see them, in a commonwealth where they are restrained. Where liberty is, they will discover themselves, and come to punishment. There is no such need of drawing you out to such punishment as death. Restrain him, rather, to some country or place; banish him. This House is a living law, but make as little use of the legislative power as you can."[2] Any government, Strickland implied, courts great danger indeed when it seeks to remedy particular offences by the prescription of particular legislation. Pivoting their tactics upon Strickland's noble argument, Baynes and Pickering sought to test out the orthodox strength by moving for a lighter punishment. Whipping was suggested and Wolsey, Lawrence, and Fiennes rose to support the moderate proposal as the House adjourned for the day.[3]

Cooper resumed the debate for the moderates on the 10th with a brilliant and taunting speech. He was shocked by the certainty with which the members prated of blasphemy. Was not Parliament magnifying the offence? Was Nayler's crime as evil as denying or cursing Christ? Was not the man obviously

[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 86.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 88.

[3] *Ibid.*, I, 89–90.

deluded? "I cannot say this is horrid blasphemy, though there may be blasphemy horrid, and more horrid, and most horrid." And, the members should recall, death itself is horrid. "It is hard," he cried, "to lead this House into such a judgment, as to pass sentence of death against such a person as fears God." When we take a life that God does not require, the blood of an innocent man is upon us. To put this man to death would be to make a martyr of him and "instead of taking away Quakerism, you establish it." Nor is mutilation much better. "If you cut out his tongue, he may write . . . if you cut off his right hand, he may write with his left." The interests of orthodoxy, Cooper maliciously observed, would best be secured by light imprisonment.[1] General Packer sought to agree, wholly missing the subtle irony of Cooper's thrusts. He did not want an inquisition established in England. Nayler might yet be saved. "You had as good cut off his head as his hand or tongue. That tongue that has blasphemed, may glorify God . . . he may write to glorify God."[2]

The moderates were seeking to appeal to the reason and common sense of the conservative majority. Colonel Hewitson submitted, as the session opened on December 11th, that the Presbyterian position was wholly untenable. He who would take this man's life would have taken St. Paul's. We should quite as logically exact the extreme penalty from Jews, Turks, infidels, and all who deny Christ.[3] The eminently sane Thurloe rose to speak with salty wisdom. Most of what Nayler had confessed at the bar was sheer drivel. The man was evidently an idolater, a deceiver, and an impostor but nothing more. In any case the prisoner could be punished only under the parliamentary act of 1650 which specifically prescribed six months' imprisonment, or conceivably banishment, for the offence alleged. The blasphemy charged against Nayler had no connection whatsoever with blasphemy as defined by Leviticus xxiv. 16, which clearly refers to the reviling of God. The Parliament must beware of stretching the Jewish law to punish offences committed under the gospel.[4]

The Presbyterians had been driven by the logic of Pickering,

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 96–98.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 100–101.

[3] *Ibid.*, I, 108.

[4] *Ibid.*, I, 112.

Cooper, and Thurloe to the difficult and dangerous task of stating precisely by what process they intended to put Nayler to death. They were by no means prepared to accept the light penalty imposed by the act of 1650, yet any other action was evidently either of dubious legality or inexpedient. It would have been possible to proceed by a bill of attainder, and to this procedure orthodox opinion for some time inclined, but this was certain to arouse the wrath of the ominously silent Protector and would refurbish a weapon which must have haunted the sleep of members who may well have dreamed uneasily of a restoration of the monarchy. It might have been possible, too, to punish Nayler by an *ex post facto* law which would define more severely the penalties of blasphemy, but it was realized that such an act would be instantly vetoed by Cromwell. Consequently the only remaining recourse lay in the treacherous and uncertain judicial powers enjoyed by a Parliament stripped of king and lords. In the quest for jurisdiction a member was even driven to the argument that the House had inherited the judicial powers of the episcopacy in the punishment of heresy and blasphemy. As the orthodox groped blindly and fanatically for a competency which could defy the authority of the Lord Protector, their positions were raked by the skilful and shifting defensive fire of their moderate opponents.

To Ashe's impolitic argument that Nayler clearly fell under the ancient act *De haeretico comburendo*, which he declared was part of the common law, Robinson replied that by this law every Protestant in England could be put to death if the papists were in power. "I like it not, to leave it arbitrary to the judgment of after parliaments to determine what is blasphemy. . . . I cannot agree to that punishment by death; nor to dismember him, which is worse than death. . . . I had rather err in point of mercy, than exceed in justice."[1] Bodurda supported him, maintaining that the House lacked judicial power sufficient to prescribe the death penalty in the case. The members had proposed to violate law in the very act of making law.[2] General Kelsey argued to the same effect. He hoped that the common law of which Ashe had spoken was "out of doors, that was but too common. We shall never rake that out of the ashes. It was so common, that it left no Protestants in England."[1] Parliament must tread very gently indeed, for it appears that the orthodox party desire to frame an *ex post facto* law in a matter in which man cannot discover the mind of God.

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 119.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 120–121.

With the resumption of debate on the following day (December 13th) Mr. Church stressed the high necessity of punishing Nayler by death in order to restrain the alarming spread of Quakerism. Whitelocke replied for the Government in a careful and thoughtful speech. He denied categorically that any authority could be advanced from the Bible for the condemnation of the heretic. Nayler had contended that Christ dwelt in him, but this was not sufficient to convict him of heresy. Indeed, the Lutheran view of the eucharist would appear to suggest a very similar opinion. Nor had Nayler sinned sufficiently against the law of nature to justify the death penalty. There could be no doubt that his excesses deserved some punishment, but Parliament should have delegated this responsibility to the common law courts in the beginning. Whitelocke warned the members that it would be "a dangerous consequence for you to make a law for punishing" the Quaker. For such a power, once usurped by Parliament, may well become an engine of destruction.[2] This opinion was likewise supported by Mr. Pedley, a member from Huntingdonshire, who maintained that Nayler could not be punished justly either by divine or by English law. "Go as high as can be in another way, and I think that may be more adequate . . . and will gain your end as to the discouraging of that party (who haply will adore him as a martyr if you should cut him off. . . .)"[3]

Godfrey and Downing summed up the orthodox argument in long and inflamed speeches on December 15th. The bitterness with which they pressed for the punishment of the heretic indicates that the violent and exhaustive consideration of the question had exacerbated the temper of the members and had laid bare irreconcilable differences in Protestant thought on the treatment of grievous heresy. Godfrey, having cited a long but muddled list of Old Testament texts supporting the death penalty, concluded with the argument that this penalty was likewise prescribed by English law. "I know no law nor statute

[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 123.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 130.

[3] *Ibid.*, I, 137–138.

which has repealed that law *de heretico comburendo*. Does not the common law declare the law against blasphemy, when it provides a punishment *comburendo*."[1] This law had been for many years illegally administered by the usurped power of the bishops, but the orthodox party demanded that it be invoked by Parliament which had created it and which should administer it.

Parliament, in its discussion of the Nayler case, had probed its way deep into the complex and difficult problem of the attitude which the Christian State should assume towards grievous error. The fear and distress of a millennium of orthodoxy had been betrayed once more in the frantic arguments of the Presbyterian members. They had been driven deep into the area of religious necessity in the defence which they had endeavoured to rear against the penetrating and destructive logic of the moderates. The moderate group had argued their case well. They had demonstrated that neither Nayler nor any other heretic could justly be punished with death under the sanction either of divine or of English law; they had posed a noble and impassioned plea that Parliament should maintain the tolerant policy of the Government in a case which, it was admitted, challenged both the charity and the wisdom of the large limits of comprehension which Cromwell had set for the Church of Christ in England; and they had chided the sensitive Presbyterians for the intolerance displayed by a party which so recently had itself suffered under the pains of a system of persecution which they now sought to perpetuate. The moderates were content with their statement of the case for toleration and as the debates were closed on the 15th had sought to bring the issue to a division. On the following day Waller rose to summarize and expound the governmental position.

Waller denied categorically that Nayler had been proved guilty of serious blasphemy. Not a shred of evidence had been presented to show that he had pretended to assume the attributes of Christ. Nor had Nayler claimed that Christ dwelt in him solely or to the exclusion of other men. The speaker challenged the orthodox members to examine their own consciences and to search the motives which caused them to demand the life of the Quaker. "Do you pass this sentence upon him to reclaim himself, or to reclaim others? If to reclaim him, you cannot after death; if before death, it will be said, it is but the terror of that which frights him. Instead of reclaiming others, you will confirm and pervert them. The ways of truth are slippery. Angels have fallen. Perfect men have fallen. . . . There is but an inch of ground to go upon between error on each side."[1]

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 141.

The moderate plea could scarcely have been couched in more eloquent and persuasive terms. As Waller closed, the question was put, quite suddenly, to the House. The pressure of the Government, the fear of raising once more the spectre of persecution, and genuine devotion to the principle of religious liberty prevailed. The motion to punish Nayler by death was defeated on December 16th by the vote of 96 to 82.[2] This division confirmed decisively the tolerant policy of the Government and represented an epochal triumph for the counsels of moderation in a case involving the most serious and flagrant blasphemy. The vote in the Nayler case may properly be regarded as a landmark in the evolution of religious liberty.

But this vote by no means disposed of the Nayler case. The moderates had prevailed in the matter of the extreme penalty, and their ranks suffered few defections in the debates which ensued concerning the "lesser punishment" which should be visited upon the unfortunate Quaker. The orthodox party, however, gained decisive support from those who had abstained from voting in the division involving the death penalty, but who now threw their support to the assistance of the zealous in their determination to inflict upon Nayler every possible punishment short of death. These barbarous proposals of an outraged orthodoxy were capably and resolutely opposed by the moderate leaders. Pickering urged the House to content itself with imprisoning Nayler since he had learned from a sober Quaker that the culprit was bewitched.[1] Desborough protested that the proposal to slit his tongue would endanger his life and at the least would "be a death of a secret nature," while Holland implored the House, "you have done what becomes magistrates. Now I would have you do like Christians, and not to be too severe."[2]

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 152. Burton, whose sympathies lay with the orthodox party, added that Waller "said a great deal more to extenuate the crime, but I minded it not."

[2] The Government's victory in the Nayler case was probably gained through the abstention of many undecided members from voting. 283 votes were cast on the motion to adjourn on December 13th. Thus it seems clear that rather more than 100 members refrained from voting. It is possible to reconstruct the opinions of a large number of the members on the case because of the general character of the debates preceding the vote. The following members were opposed to the death penalty for Nayler and hence may be regarded as moderates: Audley, Baynes, Berkeley, Bodurda, Bridge, Broghill, Clarke, Cooper, Desborough, Fiennes, Hewitson, Highland, Holland, Howard, Jones, Kiffen, Kelsey, Henry Lawrence, Matthews, Packer, Pickering, Pedley, Reynolds, Robinson, Strickland, Sydenham, Thurloe, Whitelocke, Waller, Wolsely, White, and Glynne.

The following members seem to have favoured the death penalty: Ashe, Butler, Nathaniel Bacon, Bampfield, Bedford, Boleles, Bond, Briscoe, Bisse, Burton, Brooke, Beake, Chadwick, Church, Clarges, Coker, Cox, Henry Cromwell, Downing, Drake, Edwards, Foot, Godfrey, Goffe, Gorges, Hatsel, Jephson, Lenthall, Markham, Milton, Onslow, Pach, Reynall, Francis Rous, sr., Shapcot, Skippon, Smith, Whalley, Wroth.

The Presbyterian majority engaged in an almost sadistic competition in urging penalties which betrayed the blind fury of a frustrated orthodoxy. The various proposals were finally collected in an "omnibus resolution" that Nayler "be set on the pillory, with his head in the pillory, in the New Palace, Westminster, for the space of two hours, on Thursday next; and shall be whipped by the hangman through the streets from Westminster to the Old Exchange, London; and there likewise be set on the pillory . . . for the space of two hours . . . in each of the said places wearing a paper, containing an inscription of his crimes; and that, at the Old Exchange, his tongue shall be bored through with a hot iron . . . and that he be afterwards sent to Bristol, and conveyed into and through the said city, on a horse bare-ridged, with his face backwards; and there also publicly whipped . . . and that from thence he be committed to prison in Bridewell, London, and there restrained from the society of all people, and kept to hard labour, till he shall be released by Parliament; and, during that time, [shall] be debarred from the use of pen, ink, and paper; and shall have no relief but what he earns by his daily labour."[3] This sentence was passed upon Nayler, while the House by a vote of 107–85 denied him the customary privilege of speaking from the pillory.

[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 153.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 153–154.

[3] *C.J.*, VII, 468.

On the following day, December 18th, the first portion of the sentence was executed.[1]

Parliament was gravely disturbed by the public sympathy which had been displayed for the prisoner and passed to the larger question of the control and restraint of Quakerism. Even the chief justice, Glynne, who had pleaded for moderation in the Nayler case, declared himself perturbed by the bigotry and scurrility of the sectaries. He was resolutely opposed to "punishing old offences with a new punishment," and was disposed to allow all liberty to tender consciences. "But those that openly profess against the ministers and ordinances and magistracy too, it is fit they should be taken a course withal; for they grow to a great number."[2] Other members followed to stress the necessity for passing general legislation against extreme sectarianism and imposing penalties designed to prevent the recurrence of the excesses of which Nayler had been guilty.

The moderate members were quick to discern the threat to tolerance implicit in the pious concern of the orthodox. Whalley reminded the members that they were by no means united in their own beliefs. The Quakers, he urged, could be cleansed of their religious errors only by the efforts of the clergy; the State must be content with imposing upon them the requirements of civil order. Whitelocke expressed his fear of any law designed to punish a vague offence like Quakerism or blasphemy, arguing that the more general such a law was the more dangerous it was to the liberties of England.[3] This view was shared by Sydenham, who maintained that Quakerism was "a word that signifies nothing, *individuum vagum* nearly. It is like the word Lollards or Puritans, under the notion whereof, many godly persons are now under the altar, their blood being poured out."[4] Such measures, Strickland added, invariably lead to repression and persecution. "We know how laws against Papists were turned upon the honestest men. We may all, in after ages, be called Quakers. It is a word nobody understands."[5] These tolerant sentiments, however, were not calculated to restrain the resolution of the orthodox party, genuinely and deeply apprehensive lest the mounting fanaticism of the sects should disintengrate the very foundations of orthodoxy in England. A committee was accordingly instructed to bring in a bill for the restraint of Quakerism. Only the tolerant disposition of the Government stood in the way of a general and perhaps frightful persecution of the sect.

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[1] *Mercurius Politicus*, December 18, 1656.

[2] Burton, *Diary*, I, 169.

[3] *Ibid.*, I, 170.

[4] *Ibid.*, I, 172.

[5] *Ibid.*, I, 173.

There was, however, in and out of Parliament a powerful and enlarging body of opinion which deplored all religious persecution and which had been grievously shocked by the barbaric excesses of the parliamentary majority in the disposition of the Nayler case. The case was rapidly assuming major importance as a test between the tolerant inclinations of the Government and the more rigid Puritan conviction as reflected in the majority group in the House. On the morning of December 20th, the day appointed for the execution of the second portion of the punishment, a petition was presented to Parliament subscribed by a number of responsible persons praying for a respite on the grounds that Nayler was dangerously weak.[1] Even the harshly orthodox Bacon was moved to support the petition, admitting that he could testify to the good repute of most of the subscribers.[2] Several members reported that the Quaker had received 310 lashes and that further severity would endanger his life. Parliament accordingly ordered a week's postponement of punishment and instructed a committee of clergymen to endeavour his spiritual reclamation in the interim.[3]

Public opinion had been greatly excited by the severity of Nayler's punishment. Parliament was inundated with petitions demanding leniency. Fox, who had hitherto remained aloof, presented a moving plea through the good offices of the favourably disposed Robert Rich. "Not only Quakers, but many outsiders, sent in petitions: residents in Exeter and Bristol, notable persons from six counties," and "London burghers of high repute."[4] One petition, signed by upwards of one hundred persons, demanded clemency for Nayler upon abstract grounds of religious liberty. The petitioners submitted

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[1] *Mercurius Politicus*, December 20, 1656.

[2] Burton, *Diary*, I, 182–183.

[3] *Mercurius Politicus*, December 20, 1656.

[4] Fogelklou, *James Nayler*, 209.

"that the civil magistrate is not the proper judge of error or blasphemy, and secondly, that corporal punishment is not a proper punishment for offences of a spiritual nature tho' it was used to the Jews for diverse special reasons, was peculiar to that legal disposition only." The charge of blasphemy under which Nayler had been convicted was denounced as both dangerous and malicious. "We dare not throw men out of heaven, and out of our hearts . . . so fast as some can." At the same time, another petition, signed by eighty-seven responsible London citizens, asked the Lord Protector to remit the rest of Nayler's sentence. They recalled Cromwell's long devotion to the cause of religious freedom and suggested that Nayler should be left to the spiritual agencies of gospel instruction.[1]

The moderate party in the House sought fully to exploit these evidences of public sentiment by reopening the question on the floor. Cooper, Robinson, and Strickland waged a bitter fight for the consideration of the petitioners' request, carrying their motion by the close vote of 91–90.[2] About thirty of the petitioners were accordingly admitted, and their spokesman, Joshua Sprigg, a New Model chaplain, made a short and careful demand for leniency. Holland rose to support the petitioners, submitting that liberty of conscience was the only means whereby a nation might be blessed. He knew of no just power by which the civil ruler might inflict penalties in spiritual causes.[3]

Downing, speaking for the conservative majority in the House, replied that liberty of conscience was not at issue in the Nayler case. He enquired, "can any man call this liberty of conscience, a permission to commit such high blasphemy and impiety . . . I would die upon the place before I would remit the sentence."[4] The orthodox were unwilling to recede from their inflexible position and the petition was denied, apparently without a division, leaving the remainder of Nayler's sentence to be executed on December 27th.

These proceedings had been followed with great concern by the Lord Protector, whose ominous silence during the frenzied parliamentary debates had caused considerable nervousness amongst the conservatives. An opportunity for executive intervention was afforded when the petitioners, having been rebuffed by Parliament, appealed directly to the Lord Protector in Nayler's behalf. They carefully disclaimed any sympathy for the Quaker's misdeeds, but expressed grave concern lest the principle of religious liberty be violated and the guarantees of the *Instrument* be undermined by the parliamentary determination to punish a man for purely religious opinions. They consequently called upon the Lord Protector to weigh the effect of the recent proceedings upon the religious articles of the constitution.[1]

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[1] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate,* cxxxi, 45 (December 20, 1656).

[2] Burton, *Diary*, I, 215–216.

[3] *Ibid.*, I, 216–217.

[4] *Ibid.*, I, 217–218.

Cromwell's position was difficult. After so many abortive trials of constitutional government, he was most anxious to avoid the appearance of interference with Parliament so long as the *Instrument* was not flouted. He had no love for the Quakers and had protested on numerous occasions that their excesses, their fanaticism, and their anti-social conduct created problems of a civil rather than a spiritual nature. At the same time he had consistently tempered the zeal of the justices and the local authorities by administrative clemency and had prevented a serious epidemic of repressive measures. But he was by no means inclined to risk the great cause of liberty of conscience upon the somewhat dubious merits of the Nayler case. We have noticed that his spokesmen in Parliament had fought a rear-guard though skilful action during the debates, never quite bringing the question of religious toleration to an open issue. Cromwell consequently resolved to intervene on the safer grounds of constitutional jurisdiction, buttressing thereby the structure of religious freedom by demanding more precise limits to the power of Parliament in questions of spiritual error.

On December 26th he despatched to the House a cold and brusque message. "Having taken notice of a sentence by you, given against one James Nayler, albeit we do abhor such wicked opinions and practices, we, being interested in the Government, desire to know the grounds and reasons how you proceeded herein without our consent."[1] This enquiry probed deeply into a delicate question which Parliament had consciously sought to evade. The moderates had harassed the conservatives during the debates by challenging the jurisdiction of Parliament and by attacking the various procedures under which the orthodox party had proposed to punish Nayler. In fact, it had been patent throughout the consideration of the case that the majority group was seeking to establish jurisdiction over heresy by exploiting the blasphemies of the miserable Quaker. They had accordingly rejected procedure by a bill, since this would clearly involve the exercise of a legislative power which they did not enjoy under the *Instrument*—a power which they were, in fact, struggling to gain. Nayler had therefore been "adjudged" guilty of his blasphemies. Parliament had sentenced him by the exercise of its nebulous and ill-defined judicial power, though the indictment had been worded with a vagueness which betrayed the uncertainty of the members. Cromwell's enquiry demanded an explicit exposition of the powers under which they had claimed jurisdiction.

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[1] *A true narrative of the examination, tryall, and sufferings of James Nayler, etc.* (L., 1657), 54–55.

The Lord Protector's message provoked an anxious and somewhat timorous debate in the House. A few of the Presbyterian irreconcilables, led by Rous, expressed dislike for the tone of Cromwell's message and displayed a disposition to force a constitutional debate similar to the one which had wrecked the previous Parliament.[2] But the great majority were alarmed by the questions which Parliament's zeal had excited and regretted the heady resolution which had precipitated the crisis. Even the doughty Downing confessed his alarm: "I wish I could propound an expedient to heal this business. . . . The Instrument of Government is but new, and our jurisdiction is but new too. It is dangerous either for him [Cromwell] to question our power, or for us to question his, in matters that are for the public safety: we must both wink."[3] Lambert sternly rebuked the intemperate zeal of the members. "It is not without good reason," he charged, "that his Highness should be satisfied. . . . He knows not by what way you have proceeded, whether upon the judicatory or legislative. He is under an oath to protect the people, both in freedom of their consciences, and persons, and liberties."[1]

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 246.

[2] The angry Rous said, "We should return this short answer to His Highness's letter, 'We had power so to do'." (Burton, *Diary*, I, 253.)

[3] *Ibid.*, I, 254.

The members realized that the Nayler case had raised constitutional questions of the gravest significance. The Government's supporters argued that Parliament had exceeded its power in passing sentence upon Nayler because its very consideration of the case was a violation of the constitution from which its power was derived. The conservatives, in a rather frantic search for authority, were pushed to the dangerous extreme of contending that Parliament had inherited organically and completely the power of earlier Parliaments with the addition of the judicial powers formerly vested in the House of Lords. This doctrine denied by a very obvious indirection the validity of the *Instrument* by whose provisions Parliament had been summoned and whose sovereignty the members had sworn to defend.[2] The wiser and more influential members counselled moderation.These questions should not be examined too closely. The unhappy Bampfield plaintively admitted that he wished he "knew upon what bottom we are," while Sydenham accused Parliament of having encroached upon the liberties of the nation.[3] Parliament enjoys no God-given power to follow its own desires. Lambert closed the discussion with a spirited rebuke of the orthodox: "I cannot understand what is meant by this judicial power. If it have the same boundless extent that the legislative has, nobody can tell us how far it may lead, if there be no negative upon it. I shall not bring it to the case of this fellow [Nayler], lest it may seem to plead too far for liberty of conscience. But admit a parliament in after-ages should be called, suitable to the temper of the people, that should bring those to your bar to be tried that have faithfully served you. . ."[4] The questions which the Lord Protector had raised, Lambert concluded, disclosed that Parliament had sought to exercise a power which was at once dangerous and arrogated. Parliament by tacit agreement dropped the discussion at this point. No reply was forwarded to Cromwell, but the enforced reflections of the members upon the problems of religious liberty and sovereignty were shortly afterwards to be fruitful.

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[1] Burton, *Diary* I, 255.

[2] Firth, *Last Years of the Protectorate*, I, 102.

[3] Burton, *Diary*, I, 273–274, 275.

[4] *Ibid.*, I, 281–282.

Meanwhile, on December 27th, the second portion of Nayler's punishment had been carried out. Burton, who went with a friend to see the spectacle, wrote: "He put out his tongue very willingly, but shrinked a little when the iron came upon his forehead. He was pale when he came out of the pillory, but high-coloured after tongue-boring. He was bound with a cord by both arms to the pillory. Rich, the mad merchant, sat bare at Nayler's feet all the time. Sometimes he sang and cried, and stroked his hair and face, and kissed his hand, and sucked the fire out of his forehead. Nayler embraced his executioner, and behaved himself very handsomely and patiently."[1] A huge crowd had witnessed the punishment in silence, while those standing nearby uncovered during the branding.[2] Some days later Nayler was transported to Bristol, where the remainder of the gruesome punishment was executed. The Bristol authorities apparently interpreted their instructions as temperately as possible. The bellman, who customarily preceded the prisoner to proclaim his offences, performed his task modestly, while one of Nayler's admirers was permitted to restrain the beadle's arm in order to mitigate the severity of the lashes.[3]

After the punishment at Bristol, Nayler was returned to London for imprisonment according to the parliamentary sentence. Both the Lord Protector and the parliamentary moderates sought in so far as possible to lighten his incarceration. On January 29, 1657, Parliament so far relaxed his close confinement as to permit his wife to attend him, while the keeper was instructed to supply all necessities.[4] Nayler's wife complained to the council on February 24th that her husband had been ill-treated and reported that the keeper had declined to permit her to visit the prisoner. The council acted with dispatch, requiring the jailer to "suffer James Naylers wife to come to him, and see that he have necessaries, according to the order of Parliament."[1] A few days later a motion ordering his removal to another cell, "where he may have the use of fire and candle, and air," and where his wife might remain with him constantly, was defeated by a narrow margin,[2] while a motion introduced on May 23rd granting Nayler a month's reprieve in the interests of his health was lost 49 to 38.[3] Pickering, who frequently acted as the Government's spokesman, moved a few days later that an attendant be placed with Nayler lest "he will die in your hands," indicating bluntly that the Lord Protector had requested this mitigation. After a short debate the request was granted, and the keeper was instructed to admit ministers who might desire to wrestle with the Quaker's blasphemous preoccupations.[4] Following the dissolution of Parliament, Nayler's imprisonment was further relaxed by orders of the council. The unfortunate man was released from prison by the restored Long Parliament in one of its first actions.[5]

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 265–266.

[2] *A true narrative of the examination . . . of James Nayler*, 42; *Mercurius Politicus*, §342.

[3] Brailsford, M. R., *A Quaker from Cromwell's Army: James Nayler* (N.Y., 1927), 156.

[4] Burton, *Diary*, I, 370.

Following the adjournment of Parliament in June 1657, the Government resumed its policy of tempering the repression of the Quakers, which was proceeding with considerable severity in many localities. Curiously, the council appears to have depended principally upon Quaker remonstrances for its information regarding excesses, and the sect, thus encouraged, became amazingly bold in laying its demands before the Government. On November 10, 1657, the council entertained a Quaker petition protesting against the harsh treatment which many members of the sect had experienced from certain justices. Instances were cited of Quakers who had been thrown into prison upon simple charges of nonconformity, refusal to uncover, and failure to attend their parish churches.[6] The Nayler case had had a sobering effect upon the Quaker leaders. The sect was attaining maturity, tending now to disown disorderly and eccentric conduct and seeking to establish itself as a sober communion clearly protected by the *Instrument*. There were consequently few complaints lodged concerning the harsh treatment of fanatical and over-zealous persons, the leaders basing their plea for toleration upon those cases where sobriety and piety could be demonstrated.

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[1] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, cliii, 128 (February 24, 1657).

[2] Burton, *Diary*, I, 380.

[3] *Ibid.*, II, 119.

[4] *C.J.*, VII, 540.

[5] *Occurrences from Foraigne Parts*, September 8, 1659.

[6] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, clvii, 87.

The council sought whenever possible to encourage this tendency towards greater restraint and sobriety. On the day when the petition of November 10th was received, orders were issued to the justices of the peace calling their attention to the unnecessary harshness with which many of them had disposed of cases involving the Quakers. The Protector and his council, it was declared, by no means approved "their mistaken principles or practices, especially in disturbing godly ministers, and affronting magistrates, yet as they mostly proceed rather from a spirit of error than a malicious opposition to authority, they are to be pitied, and dealt with as persons under a strong delusion, who will suffer and perish than do anything contrary to their ungrounded and corrupt principles." The council was disturbed to learn that several of these men had died while in prison. It was anxious to avoid undue severity and therefore ordered the release of the Quakers then in prison. Moreover, the justices were instructed to avoid cases of contempt by forcibly removing the hats of those who refused to uncover, since "those whose miscarriage arises from defect of understanding should not be treated too severely."[1]

The council again lent its consideration to the sectarian problem in 1658. Evidence was at hand which disclosed that there were 114 Quakers in prison, many of them charged with offences which the Government had expressly ordered the justices to ignore or to treat lightly. A Quaker petition submitted that "some are hauled out of their meetings and whipped; some are almost killed going to meetings," while many had been indicted for failure to attend services in the parish churches.[2] Another petition complained that almost every jail in England housed a Quaker. "It is no less strange to us that such sufferings should come on us for conscience' sake, when most of us have been instruments with you in casting off the burden of oppression." The Quakers lay under the lash of persecution despite the liberty of concience which England supposedly enjoyed. The petitioners enquired: "Was not freedom of conscience the great cause of the late wars? Christ only should rule the conscience . . . we stand against parliament, councils, and all who make or execute laws against conscience. We beg you to consider if it is not time to reform the laws."[1]

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[1] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, clvii, 88.

[2] *Ibid.*, clxxxii, 137 (September 30, 1658).

These complaints were carefully considered by the council. The Government appears to have based its administrative policy in this matter on a list, prepared and submitted by the Quakers, of 123 persons then in prison, together with a brief statement of the nature of each offence. Each case was critically examined. Thus the petition cited the case of one "Dan. Baker, late a captain of a ship of war, now in Winchester for speaking to a priest," which the council annotated more correctly and realistically as "convicted for disturbing a minister in divine service." The memorandum disclosed that most of the prisoners were held for offences which the Government had no desire to prosecute. Sixty, or almost half, of the prisoners had been committed for refusal to pay tithes, thirty-two for disturbing divine services or reviling ministers, six for refusal to uncover, four for holding unlawful meetings, two for declining to take an oath, and two for vagabondage.

On October 18, 1658, the council despatched a letter to the various jailers listed demanding "a particular account of the cause of commitment and detention" of the persons named, and requiring "copies of the warrants by which they stand committed." The Quakers were troublesome prisoners and several of the keepers appended to the information demanded by the council a gratuitous request that their charges might be released.[2] The data concerning the Quakers were placed in the hands of a committee of the council, which after further consideration ordered the release of forty-one of the prisoners,[3] while the judges were again instructed to exercise greater moderation in further cases.

The death of Cromwell occurred at this time, just as the Government had evolved a satisfactory and tolerant formula for the administration of the problems raised by Quaker dissent. The Protector had handled a perplexing and thorny question with rare patience and good humour. The Government had arrived at an informal understanding with the responsible elements of Quaker leadership by which a fairly clear differentiation was made between the exercise of religious convictions, however eccentric, and the disturbance of the religious and social life of England. Unfortunately, however, Cromwell's tolerance towards the Quakers did not reflect predominant orthodox opinion, and a fresh and severe wave of persecution was to follow the restoration of the monarchy.

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[1] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, clxxxii, 138.

[2] *Ibid.*, clxxxiii, 16; *cf. ibid.*, clxxxiii, 23, 32.

[3] *Ibid.*, clxxxiii, 139.

2. The attempt to define the church: restrictions on liberty of conscience, February 1657–September 1658

The long debates in Parliament had clearly demonstrated an irreconcilable difference between the sentiments of orthodox Puritanism and the growing sectarian liberalism of which Cromwell was the lay champion. Parliament had been thwarted in its resolution to frame repressive measures for the curbing of error, but it was still determined to define more exactly and rigidly the limits of the National Church and to exclude large sections of English Protestantism from legal recognition and protection. English Presbyterianism had by this late date become so far chastened as to embrace Independency, which was steadily casting off its more radical elements, and was even prepared to accept the Baptists within the framework of the Church. Beyond this it could not go without mortal violence both to its ideology and to its conception of church government. The Nayler incident had likewise revealed uncharted areas in the constitution of the State into which Parliament dared not push too far. Its very legal capacity in the Nayler case had been challenged by a powerful minority of its own number and both its jurisdiction and its wisdom had been called into question by the Lord Protector.

England was quite as weary of constitutional uncertainty as of the sheer force which undergirded Cromwell's firm mastery of the State. Parliament represented very substantial elements in national opinion when it turned, following the Nayler case, to an effort to define more exactly the constitution and to regularize the Government by means of the dignity and restraints of tradition. These influences account in large measure for the effort on the part of Parliament to persuade Cromwell to accept the crown in the later days of the session. This solution was not without powerful appeal to the Protector, who had been greatly exercised by his inability to intervene decisively in the interests of religious liberty in the Nayler case, and who desired above all to preserve to England the benefits of successful revolution by engrafting them upon the sound trunk of constitutional development rather than by shoring them up indefinitely by force. These views he expressed clearly to a large group of fellow officers who had called (February 27, 1657) to protest against the proposal that he accept the crown. He assured his colleagues that he cared not at all for the title which was but "a feather in a hat." But he had been nothing but a drudge. He had been compelled to dissolve both the Long Parliament and the Nominated Parliament. The *Instrument of Government* had been reared as the foundation of the State, yet still another Parliament which had attacked it had necessarily to be dismissed. Nor was the present outlook any more encouraging to the Protector. "By the proceedings of this Parliament, you see they stand in need of a check, or balancing power . . . for the case of James Nayler might happen to be your own case. By their judicial power they fall upon life and member, and doth the Instrument enable me to control it?"[1]

We are not here concerned with the great constitutional debates which absorbed Parliament during the early months of 1657, save as they sought to settle the religious question, but it should be observed that Cromwell was so anxious to find firm common ground with conservative opinion as reflected in Parliament that he was prepared to accept an Establishment far more illiberal and narrow than the tolerant and comprehensive structure which he had laboured so manfully to create as the spiritual home for Englishmen of all religious persuasions.

On March 17, 1657, Parliament reached the question of the religious settlement in its discussion of the constitution.[2] We have previously indicated that the guarantees set up by the

[1] Burton, *Diary*, I, 383–384.

[2] *Thurloe Papers*, VI, 123.

Instrument of Government had been left extremely vague, stating simply that " the Christian religion, as contained in the Scriptures," should "be held forth and recommended as the public profession of these nations." Cromwell had by administrative policy created a loosely federated National Church embracing the great sectarian bodies, while the Romanists, the Anglicans, and the less favoured sects had been extended a large measure of toleration without this community of officially recognized churches. Orthodox opinion had steadfastly opposed this disintegrative conception of the Church, while Parliament, Puritan in its predominant opinion, demanded the erection of a National Church with a well defined and a closely knit disciplinary structure as the corner-stone of the new constitution.[1] This determination was in no sense novel—it had dominated the deliberations of the Westminster Assembly and, enlarged by Owen's inclusion of conservative Independency, had certainly enjoyed the support of successive Parliaments during the Commonwealth and Protectorate. In the earlier years the Puritan ideal had been shattered by political occurrences, by its inflexible opposition to the sects, and by the fears of the army that sectarianism would be the first prey of orthodoxy. More recently Cromwell had resolutely opposed this ecclesiastical conception on the grounds that it endangered religious liberty and afforded no solution for the treatment of very large Christian groups which it did not propose to tolerate and which it was neither powerful nor intolerant enough to extirpate.

Sir Richard Onslow rose on March 18th to introduce a resolution embodying the Puritan, though chastened, conception of the National Church under circumstances which we have seen to be most favourable to its adoption. Onslow moved, as a basis for discussion, that "the true Christian religion, as it shall be expressed in a Confession of Faith, to be hereafter agreed by his Highness and the Parliament, according to the rule and warrant of the Word of God, and no other, shall be held forth and asserted as the public profession of these nations."[2] It was further proposed that ministers who could not subscribe to the public confession should be ineligible for public maintenance. From the first it was apparent that the Presbyterian members were working in close harmony with the conservative Independents,[1] and it appeared probable that the public confession which Onslow's motion contemplated was none other than that propounded some years earlier by Owen's committee.

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[1] Firth, *Last Years of the Protectorate*, I, 145.

[2] Burton, *Diary*, I, 388; *C.J.*, VII, 506.

The doctrinal structure of the Church and the limits of toleration were further defined by a resolution introduced on the following day providing liberty in the exercise of their religion to persons who professed faith in "God the father, and in Jesus Christ, his eternal Son, the true God, and in the Holy Spirit, God coequal with the Father and the Son, one God, blessed for ever," and who acknowledged the scriptures to be the true and revealed Word of God, even though they differed in other matters of doctrine, worship, and discipline.[2] This provision evidently excluded the irreligious, the Unitarians, and possibly the Quakers from toleration, but, it should be observed, no mention was made either of Romanism or of Anglicanism. Thurloe, who was greatly encouraged by this circumstance, wrote to Lockhart that Parliament had arrived at a religious settlement affording more "liberty of conscience than ever they were in England, and much beyond what any man expected this Parliament would have done."[3] But these tolerant omissions were speedily remedied. Anglicanism and popery were proscribed by express provision,[4] while those who should "revile or reproach the Confession of Faith," and blasphemous, profane, drunken, and licentious persons were likewise to be excluded from the benefits of religious liberty.[5] This dragnet was sufficiently inclusive for the repression of extreme sectarianism and, given the assistance of conservative magistrates, was capable of almost limitless extension.

The parliamentary definition of the limits of toleration and comprehension represents a very considerable regression from the vague but moderate provisions of the *Instrument*. It was evident to the nation that Puritanism had learned nothing from the bitter experiences of a dozen years, and a storm of sectarian protest was addressed to the Lord Protector. One sectary ironically enquired "whether the several professions amongst us, that, by the national faith, shall be concluded unorthodox, may not, from these beginnings, and other foundations already laid, expect to receive the like entertainment at the hands of this generation; as the godly and faithful followers of Christ have at the hands of the worldly powers, and national church, in times past."[1]

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[1] *Thurloe Papers*, VI, 183.

[2] Burton, *Diary*, I, 389; *C.J.*, VII, 507.

[3] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, cliv, 31 (March 17, 1657).

[4] *Humble petition and advice*, Art. xi.

[5] Burton, *Diary*, I, 392–393; *C.J.*, VII, 507; *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate* clv, 73.

On March 31, 1657, the resolutions which Parliament had been drafting in an effort to define the political and religious constitution were presented to Cromwell as *The Humble Petition and Advice*. The Speaker, in explaining the parliamentary recommendations on religion, urged the high duty of setting forth the true Christian faith in England as defined by articles of belief to be agreed upon. This National Church must be protected from the "virulent tongues of petty and disorderly persons" by proper penalties provided by law. Parliament had sought in its recommendations to avoid two extremes equally inimical to true faith. On the one hand, England should avoid "the permission of the exercise of more religions than one, which is a dangerous indulgence and toleration"; and on the other, "the entering and sifting into men's consciences, when no overt scandal is given, which is a vigorous and strainable inquisition."[2] The members were reminded that schism and controversy were present in England and that they could not be easily healed. Parliament was concerned only that such divisions should not extend to the fundamentals of the Christian faith.[3]

The *Petition and Advice* was rejected by Cromwell—after grave wrestlings of spirit, it should be observed—upon the grounds that he could not accept the title of king rather than because of the illiberal religious provisions of the document.[4] In a long series of discussions, which do not concern our subject, Parliament and the Protector sought to arrive at an understanding. Cromwell expressed himself as well content with the religious Establishment which Parliament had outlined,[1] insisting only upon the inclusion of the earlier ordinances regulating the ministry. On April 28th the House acceded to his demand by a resolution setting up triers with the reservation that future commissioners should be approved by Parliament. At the same time the work of the ejectors was extended for a period of three years, though in this case, too, Parliament required control over their appointment in order to prevent the perversion of the Church by a "popish prince" in the future.[2] After further delay, Parliament struck the title of king from the *Humble Petition and Advice* and Cromwell accepted it as the constitution of the State.

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[1] *A narrative of the late Parliament*, *Harl. Miscl.*, III, 445.

[2] Burton, *Diary*, I, 408–409.

[3] *Ibid.*, I, 410.

[4] Firth, *Last Years of the Protectorate*, I, 167–170.

Cromwell had paid for constitutional stability in the coin of religious liberty. In particular, he had gravely weakened the hitherto complete devotion of sober sectarianism to his cause. There were many men in England who regarded Cromwell as the only bulwark protecting the nation from a bitter and hideous struggle of rival and petty orthodoxies for supremacy. Their confidence was gravely shaken by the adoption of the *Humble Petition and Advice*. Cromwell could reply that the comprehension and tolerance of the Church contemplated by that constitution depended wholly upon the breadth and liberality with which the fundamental faith should be defined, and in the formulation of that definition he proposed to play a decisive role. It was evident, too, that the administrative tolerance whereby Cromwell had given to England a remarkable and almost irreproachable degree of religious freedom had been maintained despite the limitations which Parliament had sought to impose.

But grave damage had been done, and sectarian confidence had been undermined. A powerful tide of protest was rising which culminated in the great petition circulated by Hazlerigg and Scot at the opening of Cromwell's last Parliament. The petitioners demanded the restoration of the supremacy of the House of Commons and, capitalizing the disaffection in the army and amongst the sectaries with the religious provisions of the new constitution, they had been able to gain thousands of signatures. So great was Cromwell's fear of disorder and agitation in the army that he abruptly dissolved Parliament a scant two weeks after its opening. Indeed, the fears which beset the sectarian groups during these months were not wholly without foundation. We have observed that Independency had grown steadily more conservative since the threat of classical presbytery had been dispelled, sloughing off its more radical adherents who were rapidly finding allies and evolving a common programme with the sects. The disposition of Independency to coalesce with moderate English Presbyterianism had become apparent as early as 1652, and in Parliament this union had been complete since 1656.

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[1] Cromwell, *Letters and Speeches*, III, Speeches §13, §14.

[2] *C.J.*, VII, 524; Burton, *Diary*, II, 50–51.

Complaints from responsible persons, in addition to rising sectarian apprehension, would indicate that the Cromwellian Establishment was, at least in certain areas, acting with unmistakable vigour in the discouragement of nonconformity. In April 1658 Sir John Hobart had charged that in his own county (Norfolk) the ejectors had been guilty of excessive rigour, "and it was scandal enough to be a minister with those commissioners."[1] Already they had deprived twenty-five ministers in the county. A few weeks later the council informed the justices of Warwickshire that earnest complaint had been made concerning the action of a constable there in indicting a parishioner for failure to attend the Congregational Church and demanding two shillings and sixpence for each day's absence. The justices were ordered to "disown the said proceedings, and discourage them in future, as contrary to the liberty of worship allowed by law."[2] Later in 1658 a petition was entertained from several responsible persons in Lincolnshire, charging that ministers of the county had been presented at the last assize for not administering the Lord's Supper in accordance with the statute of Edward VI which, it was alleged, remained in force. They expressed grave fear lest the conditions which had prevailed under the bishops might be revived. They asked that ministers might be supported in the exercise of their calling and that "liberty of conscience . . . the chiefest jewel lately purchased so dearly" should be maintained inviolate against its enemies.[3]

[1] Burton, *Diary*, II, 58.

[2] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, clxxxi, 50.

[3] *Ibid.*, clxxxiii, 136 (November, 1658).

It seems clear that the Government encountered very considerable opposition from the orthodox in its determination to maintain religious liberty. Cromwell had deemed it expedient not to resist parliamentary opinion too stubbornly in view of its preoccupation with the necessity for defining more rigidly the Established Church. The need for settling the constitution, for retaining support for his ambitious and costly foreign policy, and for attracting the loyalty of the conservative elements of Puritan opinion had dictated compromise. His long and consistent devotion to religious toleration, the divisions amongst the orthodox communions, the large areas of administrative jurisdiction remaining in the hands of the Government, the share which he would have in framing the fundamentals of faith, and the unqualified support of large and powerful sections of sectarian and lay opinion were sufficient guarantees that religious freedom would be preserved in England. Cromwell realized, as did few of his advisers, that religious toleration had been the one permanent and wholly fruitful gain of the Civil Wars and that it constituted the one durable and indispensable foundation for the Revolutionary Government once the prestige and remarkable ability of the Protector had been removed by death. Cromwell died in September 1658. The inability of the revolutionary groups to unite England about this principle, quite as much as their political rivalry and ineptitude, occasioned the disintegrative processes which constituted the prelude to the restoration of the Stuart dynasty.

E. The Disintegration of Sectarian Leadership, September 1658–April 1660

The brief period of Richard Cromwell's Protectorship was dominated by incessant constitutional agitation and military intrigue. Republican sentiment was rife in the army. The officers, whose influence Oliver Cromwell had never sufficiently curbed, were engaged in disloyal and short-sighted plots to enhance their own influence, while the Republicans led by Vane and Ludlow maintained a steady and violent opposition to the constitution of the Protectorate. The great mass of Englishmen, long since disillusioned and wearied by endless change and uncertainty, observed these manipulations and intrigues with complete listlessness, though many observers realized that they heralded the restoration of stable government in the crown. Richard Cromwell displayed almost as great an inertia, capitulating to the republican demands in May 1659, without any effort at resistance.

In a period when the very source of sovereignty was in debate, the religious policy of the Government was inevitably feeble and undistinguished. The debates of Richard's Parliament (January 27, 1659–April 22, 1659) were principally concerned with the constitution of the State, and the problem of religion received no more than incidental attention. The Presbyterians and conservative Independents were again predominant in the body. There were repeated intimations that a proposal for the erection of a Calvinistic State Church enforced by legislation calculated to repress dissent and extirpate error would be made directly the critical constitutional problems had been settled.

Indeed, the hopes of the Presbyterians had been notably revived by the gains made by orthodoxy in the last session of the late Protector's parliament. On the opening day of that session (January 21, 1658) Richard Darley, a member for Yorkshire, had proposed the reconvention of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. The motion was prematurely and inopportunely made, but none the less enjoyed the support of a number of extremist Presbyterians who had been excluded from the previous session of the Parliament. One of them, Gibbes, pointed out, in supporting the motion, that "what the [late] Assembly did is in print; but it is not in practice." Certainly the institution of some discipline in the Church was necessary in order to preserve the corn from the weeds of error. But the issues raised by the motion were too provocative and explosive to be entertained at a time when Parliament had high hopes of arriving at a compromise religious agreement with Cromwell, and few of the Presbyterians gave it serious encouragement. A member pointed out that the Assembly had sat for years at great expense without reaching an agreement. As much had been done towards formulating the fundamentals of faith as was humanly possible. Saint Nicholas supported this point of view. He declared that he deplored the growth of error and would welcome Christian unanimity, "yet it has been a great satisfaction to men's spirits that they have not been imposed upon." His motion that the question be waived was accepted without a division.[1]

But the Presbyterian tone in Richard Cromwell's Parliament in the next year was far less conciliatory. Members pointed out that blasphemy and error had taken root in the chaotic days of the *Agreement of the People*, and had since prospered in the fertile soil of religious toleration.[2] There were ominous suggestions that England lay under the sin of the undischarged obligations which she had assumed in the Covenant. Colonel Birch declared that the enemies of the Church of Christ had brought nothing but ruin and decay. "See what congregations we had in '43, and what now. It is questioned whether we have a Church in England; questioned, I doubt, whether Scripture or rule of life is in England."[3] Some means must be taken to check the spawn of sects. The boundless liberty which the nation has experienced has all but destroyed true liberty.[4] These orthodox apprehensions led to the appointment of a committee charged with bringing in a bill to supply the defects in the laws abolishing the use of the Book of Common Prayer, and "to provide against the using of other superstitious ceremonies, and practices in divine worship," with particular attention to suppression of the Papists, Quakers, Socinians, and "the setters up of the Jewish worship."[5]

These orthodox sentiments had been heard with great disquiet by the moderates in the House. General Packer had spoken movingly on February 9th of the high necessity of preserving both religious and civil liberty. The people of England, he said, have learned to look upon Parliament as the source and bulwark of religious freedom, and that trust Parliament will betray at its own peril.[6] Another member reminded the Presbyterians that any obligation which England might have undertaken by the reception of the Covenant had been completely liquidated by the seditious invasion of the Scots.[7] Reynolds recalled that the Westminster Assembly had occasioned the first fatal breach in the solidarity of the Long Parliament. The House had set up a Presbyterian government to please the divines, but the Presbyterian clergy would be content with nothing less than a *jure divino* power over consciences.[1]

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, II, 334–336.

[2] *Ibid.*, III, 113–114.

[3] *Ibid.*, III, 138.

[4] *Ibid.*, III, 290.

[5] *Mercurius Politicus*, February 21, 1659.

[6] Burton, *Diary*, III, 159.

[7] *Ibid.*, III, 177–178.

The Presbyterian hatred of blasphemy and error found outlet in charges of atheism and blasphemy introduced against one of the members, Henry Neville, the translator of Machiavelli.[2] Burton came into the House late on February 16th to find the members engrossed in the discussion of the case. Rather loose charges had apparently been brought by John Bulkeley, a member for Christ Church, upon the testimony of three ministers, who, it was alleged, had heard Neville utter blasphemous opinions.[3] Several members pointed out the danger involved in loose charges, while Colonel Bennet, a member for Launceston, reminded the House that "godly opposites are apt to consider one another as monsters, and heretics. Let us all live by a law, whatever a man be. He has but an accusation upon him unproved. . . . Let the accusers post down their names, and as to time and place in positive terms; not ambiguous and doubtful, but certain. . . ."[4] Another speaker recalled that the *Instrument of Government* had extended liberty of conscience to all men who professed faith in Jesus Christ, even if they denied His divinity. Vane dismissed the charge contemptuously: "It neither comprehends certainty of time, place, fact, or person. When they could accuse our Saviour of nothing else, they brought in blasphemy."[5] After five hours of wrangling in which the now uncomfortable Bulkeley was forced to admit that his information rested upon no better testimony than hearsay, the whole question "fell asleep . . . nobody knows how."[1] Neville had received quick and effective defence from the ablest and most influential members of the House, and though they rested their arguments principally upon the improper procedure adopted by the accuser it was evident that they had no kidney for a heresy trial reminiscent of the Nayler case.

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, III, 207–208.

[2] Henry Neville (1620–1694) was the grandson of the greater statesman of the same name. After study at Oxford, Neville travelled abroad for some time, returning to England in 1645. He embraced the parliamentary cause and in 1651 was appointed to the Council of State. Neville became suspect to the Government because of his radical republicanism and for several years was under surveillance. Following the death of Cromwell, he was returned to Parliament in late December 1658, where he was associated with the radical republican leadership. Neville went into retirement in 1664, devoting himself to a versatile literary career which included the publication of his still useful translation of Machiavelli's principal works.

[3] Burton, *Diary*, III, 296.

[4] *Ibid.*, III, 297.

[5] *Ibid.*, III, 298.

Towards the close of the session, the prevailing Presbyterian temper of Parliament was again displayed in a bitter debate provoked by the motion of one Grove on March 30th for the setting aside of a day for public fasting and humiliation.[2] The first paragraph of the motion was harmless, scarcely differing perceptibly from scores of such resolutions which Parliament customarily passed as a matter of pious routine. After deploring the more general sins and shortcomings of the nation, the resolution held that God had been principally provoked by the fact that "these nations are overspread with many blasphemies, and damnable heresies, against God Himself, and His glorious attributes; against the Lord Jesus Christ, His person, His offices, and His merits; against the Holy Spirit; against the Word of God," besides many other abominable errors. The Church has been divided and religion prostituted by this unforgivable laxity. But even more ominous was the allegation that these errors had arisen because of "the too much remissness, and connivance of the civil magistrates; to whom belongs the care of maintaining God's publick worship, honour and purity of doctrine, as well as of punishing all sins against the second Table." Liberty of conscience has been abused by sectaries who have disseminated heretical and blasphemous opinions without restraint from the civil ruler. England must be recalled to its duty in preserving God's truth and in fulfilling the sacred obligations which it has undertaken in the Covenant.[3]

The motion was all too reminiscent of the temper and rigidity of Presbyterianism in the early sessions of the Long Parliament. The moderates appreciated the gravity of the intolerant change which had been so apparent in the sentiment of the present

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, III, 305. Apparently charges of blasphemy were also filed against another member, Young, on the same day, though Burton made no mention of it. (*Vide Thurloe Papers*, VII, 616.)

[2] *Ibid.*, IV, 300.

[3] *C.J.*, VII, 624.

Parliament and attacked vehemently the intolerance underlying the Presbyterian psychology. Vane spoke with great heat and fine effect. It was, he alleged, a hypocritical fast to which Parliament would call the nation. "This imposition upon consciences is, I fear, the setting up of that which you always cried out against, and disowned for your cause. . . . It is a coercing the conscience."[1] Broughton supported him by warning Parliament that many ministers could not in conscience read such a declaration. "Peace ought mainly to be aimed at. . . . Twenty times I beseech you, be tender, and do not impose upon gracious spirits,"[2] while Colonel Okey declared he knew "divers ministers that will be out of town" if the reading of the declaration were made compulsory.[3]

On April 5th the formidable Hazlerigg rose to speak in opposition. He feared that the House was preparing to impose a grievous burden upon consciences. He was not averse to the erection of a moderate Presbytery, but he detected a snake within the wording of this fair declaration.[4] Another member expressed a similar view. Unquestionably the sects were dangerous, particularly the Quakers, but he could not favour a rigid Presbyterianism or the coercion of conscience as the cure for heresy. Vane spoke hotly of the threat to toleration implicit in the declaration, and as the division approached tempers grew very short and nerves were frayed. When the question was put, "all or most of the republicans flocked out, either to dine, or not to be present at the question," which was approved by the vote of 94–34.[5]

The debates of Parliament during these troubled weeks betrayed all too clearly the confusion of the members and the absence of a guiding spirit. There was constant apprehension lest the army should intervene decisively once more, and the several factions were wholly unable to compose their quarrels. The sands of revolution were very rapidly running out. Richard Cromwell had sought to follow the policy of his father. He had laboured earnestly to effect a civil settlement which should likewise provide for a religious liberty quite as broad and complete as that maintained by the late Protector. But he lacked both the genius and the force of character to translate wholly admirable theory into political reality.

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[1] Burton, *Diary*, IV, 329.

[2] *Ibid.*, IV, 330.

[3] *Ibid.*, IV, 332.

[4] *Ibid.*, IV, 336–337.

[5] *Ibid.*, IV, 344–345.

On April 22nd the council of officers forced the dissolution of Parliament. But the army did not dare absorb power completely into its own hands nor was it prepared to undertake the collection of necessary revenues by arbitrary methods. The predominant republican agitators desired to recall the surviving members of the purged Long Parliament and to vest supreme power in that body until a more settled and permanent constitution could be agreed upon. A deputation of officers accordingly waited upon Lenthall, who in 1640 had been chosen speaker of the House of Commons, to persuade him to resume his post. On May 7, 1659, he was installed at Westminster with forty-two surviving members of the Long Parliament. This body almost immediately declared England to be a Commonwealth whose government was vested in a single house.[1] The restored Parliament contained in theory about 120 members, though not more than 80 could be persuaded to attend. It was predominantly Independent in its religious complexion, since rather more than 200 excluded Presbyterians were not permitted to resume their seats. The restored Long Parliament was consequently tolerant in its religious policy. Indeed, its leaders seemed to realize that they could secure the confidence and loyalty of the army and the nation at large only by championing without reservation the principle of religious toleration. But this alone could not suffice to bring peace and stability to a distracted England.

Parliament acted with almost desperate haste in its effort to find support for itself amongst those elements of political opinion devoted to the cause of religious toleration. On May 10th a committee was appointed to investigate the cases of persons still in prison on religious charges and to make recommendations for their immediate discharge. The jails were speedily cleared of Quakers, including Nayler, and most of the other religious extremists were released. At about the same time the House bestowed favourable consideration upon a petition from the army officers, asking, among other things, that liberty of conscience and equality should be granted to all who believed in

[1] Ludlow, *Memoirs*, II, 72–83.

the doctrine of the trinity and the inspiration of the Bible. The officers would exclude from this liberty, however, papists and prelatists as well as those who practised licentiousness and profanity under the cloak of religion.[1] A few days later a similar petition was received from Monck and the officers of the Scottish army. It was observed that this representation was couched in terms which would have admitted prelacy to toleration and which recalled all too vividly the broadly conceived tolerance of Cromwell. The officers demanded that Parliament "be pleased to countenance godliness and all the sincere professors thereof . . . and suffer no other yoak to be imposed upon the consciences of God's people, then what may be agreeable to the Word of God."[2]

The strength of the army's devotion to religious toleration suggests that the Protector might well have preserved his power had he taken his stand firmly on the principle of religious liberty, seeking at the same time to enlarge the sphere of his influence in the army. It will be recalled that the more radical republicans and sectaries had been gradually removed from their commands by Oliver Cromwell. These men had been replaced by professional soldiers like Monck, Broghill, Fauconberg, Ingoldsby, and Lockhart, who "were not rigid Puritans or radicals, bent on making a new heaven or a new earth, but men of moderate opinions, eager to support the Protectorate so long as the only alternatives were anarchy or a Restoration to be effected by Scots anxious to impose an intolerant Presbyterianism, or by foreign armies."[3] Richard Cromwell made the fatal error of not attempting to arrive at an agreement with this able and powerful military group; instead he mistook the confused ambitions and principles of the older clique of officers who had been close to his father as the predominant opinion of the army. He could not foresee that Monck's troops were prepared to follow him without question upon any mission or that Lambert's oscillations of policy were to lose for him the confidence of his own veterans.

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[1] *S.P. Dom., Commonwealth and Protectorate*, cciii, 5 (May 12, 1659).

[2] *Publicke Intelligencer*, §177 (May 16, 1659).

[3] Davies, Godfrey, *The Army and the Downfall of Richard Cromwell*, *Huntington Library Bulletin*, §7 (April, 1935), 133.

The predominance of the army was demonstrated when on May 21, 1659, Parliament passed a resolution guaranteeing liberty of conscience which followed precisely the demands set forth by the officers just ten days earlier. By implication the Socinians and the Quakers were excluded from toleration, while the proscription of the Anglicans and Papists was specific. All other persons should have "due encouragement, and equal protection, in the profession of their faith, and exercise of religion; whilst they abuse not this liberty to the civil injury of others."[1] This resolution, which followed the pattern of moderate Puritan thought as it had developed during the previous decade, was not calculated to win broad popular support for the Government. It certainly excluded a majority of Englishmen from the benefits of toleration, while it offended a very large minority in the army and in the nation at large which would support no government not fully committed to the principles of religious liberty. At the same time, the resolution was not sufficiently rigid to gain the full approval of the conservative Presbyterians, who were especially strong in the City and who had high hopes of retrieving a classical Presbytery out of the political chaos of the period. The existing Government was consequently without enthusiastic or broad support in its religious policy, while its political power rested upon no firmer basis than the uncertain allegiance of the army. The fears of a Royalist rising alone prevented an open rupture during the summer of 1659. The quarrel between the military and the Rump was incurable. Parliament resisted bitterly the effort of the army to make itself autonomous and resented the steady and gratuitous attempts of the officers to influence its deliberations. The ignominious collapse of the royalist uprising in August precipitated an open break.

In early October the officers delivered an ultimatum to Parliament requiring the settlement of the command, complete military control over dismissals from the service, and other concessions no less destructive to parliamentary sovereignty. Parliament, emboldened by the apparent loyalty of Monck,[2] answered by revoking the commissions of Lambert and other high officers concerned in the drafting of the petition, while ignoring the demands set out by the council of officers. In an effort to forestall a military coup, supreme command of the army was vested in trusted officers and it was declared to be an act of high treason to levy taxes without an express warrant of Parliament.[1] At the same time the House, acting with desperate haste, instructed a committee to bring in a bill "for protection of persons in the publick and private worship of God" at the earliest possible moment.[2]

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[1] *C.J.*, VII, 662; *Publicke Intelligencer*, §177 (May 21, 1659).

[2] *C.J.*, VII, 792.

Three days later (October 10, 1659) Parliament published a resolution defining the limits of toleration which is to be compared only with the *Instrument of Government* in its liberality and breadth. Unfortunately, however, it is evident from the political events of these troubled days and from the quite unparliamentary haste that the House was striving frantically, if belatedly, to enlarge the base of its support throughout the nation. It explained rather lamely that the apparently sudden conversion of the members to a policy of toleration was due to the fact that a public resolution giving effect to religious liberty "should have been published some time since, but it [was] by accident omitted." The resolution declared further that the supreme power of the State "is not interested to restrain the profession of any person" who acknowledges faith in God and Christ "and in the Holy Scriptures as the will and Word of God." All persons holding to these fundamentals of faith will be encouraged and protected in the exercise of their faith and worship so long as they conduct themselves soberly and quietly.[3]

This parliamentary declaration would have barred only the Socinians and the Quaker extremists from toleration. The Anglicans were tacitly admitted to religious liberty. It must be indicated, however, that the earlier proclamation of this Parliament was without doubt a more accurate measure of the tolerant sentiment of the members. But it is noteworthy that Parliament when endangered felt that public opinion could be won by further extending the confines of religious liberty rather than by contracting them as orthodox opinion had so long and so shrilly insisted. This may be said to constitute the greatest gain which the period of civil war had achieved. The great mass of Englishmen had been convinced, through observing the bitter internecine struggles of rival orthodoxies and through two decades of sectarian and moderate devotion to the principles of religious toleration, that religious liberty alone could provide a firm foundation for the restoration of either civil or spiritual peace in the nation.

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[1] *C.J.*, VII, 795.

[2] *Mercurius Politicus*, October 7, 1659.

[3] *Ibid.*, October 10, 1659 (§590).

The military clique did not hesitate to accept the challenge of Parliament for supremacy. On October 13th Lambert and his fellow officers disposed their forces in Westminster and the City, forcibly expelling the Rump once more.[1] There was now no civil government in England. After hurried consultations a Council of State consisting of twenty-three members was appointed, composed principally of officers, to whom administration was entrusted.[2] The Council immediately announced that a new constitution would shortly be promulgated and sought by all possible inducements to secure the attachment of the inscrutable Monck. The northern general, however, denounced without reservation the ambition of the officers, assured the Speaker of his devotion to Parliament and religious liberty, and, having secured Scotland, prepared to march south with his veteran army. The power of the officers now rested upon precisely those sands which had engulfed the recently dissolved Parliament. London was disaffected; Monck had crossed the border; and the military junto found itself without popular support. Once more the magic formula of religious toleration was employed in an effort to bolster up the collapsing authority of the Council of State. A desperate game of politics was being played in which liberty of conscience was regarded as the principal and most valuable piece. On December 13th the general council of officers announced that no impositions whatsoever would be placed upon "the consciences of them that fear God,"[3] while some days later the officers of the Irish army declared that "it is not our intention to impose upon any tender consciences, being otherwise sound in the fundamentals of religion."[4] But it was of no avail. Before the declaration of the

[1] *C.J.*, VII, 797.

[2] Ludlow, *Memoirs*, II, 131 ff.

[3] *Mercurius Politicus*, §598.

[4] *Ibid.*, §600 (December 28, 1659).

Irish army had reached London, Monck had effected the restoration of the Long Parliament and had broken off negotiations with Lambert.[1]

The restored Long Parliament was even weaker and more vaguely representative than before. Men like Vane and Whitelocke, who had been privy to the recent expulsion, did not dare resume their seats, and a scant fifty members constituted the largest attendance.[2] London was in a state of ferment, demanding the restoration of the secluded members, which, it was generally recognized, would have meant a renewal of Presbyterian supremacy. At the same time, petitions were pouring in from the provinces and the sects requiring a clear statement from Parliament regarding its intention to preserve religious liberty.[3] A huge petition signed by thousands of subscribers declared that it was commonly believed that under pretence of extirpating blasphemy and error Parliament was plotting to restore the king. The petitioners warned the House that civil war and bloodshed would certainly ensue if this were undertaken and submitted that liberty of conscience must be regarded as the only certain foundation for the State.[4] The harassed members announced somewhat angrily that "provision shall be made for due liberty of conscience in matters of religion, according to the Word of God," in good time.[5]

Parliament set its teeth against these various pressures and sought to grasp complete and self-perpetuating power to itself. It did not dare recall the excluded members lest chaos and civil war follow upon their certain attempt to set up a Presbyterian establishment. It did not dare call for a general election lest the monarchy and Anglicanism should be restored by a nation confused and weary of political and religious instability. Instead, Parliament proposed to fill the vacant seats in judicious by-elections for which it was not yet prepared to set a date.[6] London was in a state of incipient rebellion, taxes could not be collected, and a complete breakdown of the administrative machinery appeared to be at hand.[1] This dangerous state of affairs played squarely into the hands of Monck, who, on February 11th, required Parliament to fill its vacancies immediately and to dissolve not later than May 6th preparatory to a general election.[2] Parliament, however, was desperate with fear that fairly conducted by-elections would lead to the return of royalist members and inevitably to a Presbyterian majority. It therefore delayed action by transparently insincere excuses and when the qualifications for members were announced it was observed that royalists and conservative Presbyterians had been carefully excluded by proscription.[3] Monck's patience was exhausted. On February 21, 1660, he restored the excluded Presbyterian members to their seats. Eleven years of sectarian dominance in the political and religious life of England was thereby terminated. Independency became once more a minority sect struggling to preserve religious liberty, at least for itself, against a resolute and vindictive Presbyterianism. It was apprehensively observed that the restored Long Parliament on the first day of its session invalidated all acts of Parliament passed since December 1648,[4] while a general election was ordered in accordance with the traditional franchise preparatory to the convention of a new Parliament on April 25, 1660.[5]

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[1] *C.J.*, VII, 797; *Clarke Papers*, IV, 219–221.

[2] *C.J.*, VII, 813.

[3] We shall examine these petitions in our consideration of lay and sectarian thought. Typical was the Warwickshire petition, *S.P. Dom.*, *Commonwealth and Protectorate*, ccxix, 36.

[4] *Mercurius Politicus*, §607 (February 9, 1660).

[5] *Ibid.*, §604 (January 19?, 1660).

[6] *C.J.*, VII, 803.

The Presbyterian majority in the Long Parliament realized that the restoration of the monarchy was now at hand. They were fanatically determined, however, to rear during their brief season of power a complete and godly ecclesiastical structure which they naïvely hoped might survive the shock of the Restoration. They were wholly unrealistic in their conviction that Charles II could be induced to grant concessions favourable to this Establishment in reward for their services in preparing the way for his return. The devotion of the Presbyterians to the monarchy was wholly secondary to their devotion to the Church which they had for so long envisaged in England. Their persistent inability to fuse their strength with English sectarianism on a foundation of broad comprehension or of religious toleration spelled their own ruin quite as finally as it did that of their natural allies. English Presbyterianism had learned nothing from twenty rich and turbulent years of history.

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[1] *C.J.*, VII, 802 ff., 834, 837.

[2] *Ibid.*, VII, 841.

[3] *Ibid.*, VII, 841–845.

[4] *Ibid.*, VII, 846.

[5] *Ibid.*, VII, 848. Royalists who had borne arms against Parliament were barred from sitting unless they could provide proof of subsequent loyalty.

One of the first actions of the restored Parliament was to instruct its committee on religion to submit a bill declaring the *Westminster Confession* to be the public faith of the nation.[1] The Presbyterians were playing a desperate game against time, and the necessary steps for the erection of the Church were taken with almost feverish haste. Within three days a bill was presented, read three times, and passed which sought to impose the *Westminster Confession* upon England.[2] At the same time, Parliament ordered the Covenant to be set up and read in every church as a solemn reminder of the nation's vows and obligations.[3] An orthodox diversion was made on the same day when an ordinance was passed requiring the immediate enforcement of the penal laws against the Catholics, clergy and laity alike, and offering £20 to informers for intelligence leading to the conviction of any priest.[4] On March 14th the legal structure of a Presbyterian Establishment was completed when it was resolved to encourage and hasten the division of the country into classical presbyters. Two days later Parliament rose, having by its best efforts sought to create and preserve the godly order against the return of the monarchy. The fixed determination of Presbyterianism to establish a Puritan orthodoxy in England had been thwarted for two decades. Not infrequently the cup of achievement had been at its lips only to be dashed by opposition which the zealous mind could neither understand nor respect. Just as the last embers of revolution were dying out, a Presbyterian Parliament which represented the political and religious thought of a previous generation formulated its conception of the Church in a pitiable effort to protect the Church of God in the coming era. At the first touch of a determined, sagacious, and irreligious king the structure of Presbyterian hopes was to collapse completely, and that communion which had been so largely responsible for the restoration of Charles Stuart was to find itself a persecuted and dwindling sect.

[1] *C.J.*, VII, 858; *Mercurius Politicus*, March 2, 1660 (§610).

[2] *Ibid.*, March 5, 1660 (§610).

[3] *C.J.*, VII, 862.

[4] *V.P.*, March 19, 1660, xxxii, 128; *Mercurius Politicus*, March 8, 1660 (§611).

III

PURITAN (PRESBYTERIAN) THOUGHT AND ITS RELATION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION, 1640–1660

A. THE METAMORPHOSIS OF PURITAN THOUGHT DURING THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

The term Puritanism should be employed with the greatest care for the period of two decades when English religious thought was being subjected to violent and irresistible forces engendered by the complete collapse of ecclesiastical authority and by political revolution. We have previously sought to define the content of English Puritanism and to establish its relation to the larger stream of Calvinistic thought which had for a century exerted so momentous an influence upon the development of Protestantism.[1] English Puritanism had been transformed by the irreconcilable hatred and essential misunderstanding of the Stuarts into a mighty spiritual force, embracing disparate groups, which stood in 1640 on the brink of open rebellion against the ruinous resolution of an ill-advised monarch to extirpate it from the religious life of England. The nature of English Puritanism had been profoundly modified by a generation of repressive policy which not infrequently must be described as persecution. Moreover, in the decade preceding the convention of the Long Parliament, Puritanism had been driven into dissent by the persistent effort of the Anglo-Catholic leaders of the Church to alter the essential character of the National Establishment. Puritanism had been compelled, almost against its will, to embrace the sturdy Protestantism, the inexorable certainty, and the implacable discipline of Presbyterianism.

It seems clear that the older Puritan thinkers, whose formative years had been embittered and whose hatred of error had been steeled by Laud's repressive policy, had by 1640 become Presbyterian in consequence of an almost obsessive resolution to erect in England sufficient safeguards against any further drift of the Church of England towards Rome. This firm determination expressed itself in the ever-accelerating attacks which were launched upon the discipline and the government of the established order in the early months of the Long Parliament. The immediate consequence of this assault upon the fabric of the Church was the ignominious collapse of ecclesiastical authority which, as administered by the Arminian divines, enjoyed no greater prestige amongst contemporary Englishmen than the now bankrupt support of the Crown. We have observed that the period of spiritual anarchy which followed was chiefly significant in that it afforded an opportunity for sectarianism, even of the most radical variety, to root itself widely and, as the future was to show, firmly in England. English Puritanism had in the period prior to the outbreak of the Civil War been a defensive coalition embracing sectarian elements which gained cohesion through persecution and the implacable hatred of otherwise incompatible spiritual groups for Arminianism and popery. The relaxation of ecclesiastical discipline released the centrifugal forces which had hitherto bound Puritanism and it was shattered almost immediately into its component parts.

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[1] Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, I, 239–243; II, 199–206.

The Puritan conscience was distressed by the fruits of its long and intimate alliance with sectarianism, while its inflexible Calvinistic orthodoxy was outraged by the spectacle of a Protestantism disintegrating into ever more radical fragments. It was evidently necessary to erect a Church, national in its scope, buttressed by the authority of the civil magistrate, and safeguarded against error and spiritual decay by a firm ecclesiastical discipline. English Puritanism had from its beginning been staunchly Calvinistic in its theology; it now embraced quite as fervently the discipline and government of the Genevan Model. It was, in fine, the Puritan intention to substitute a Presbyterian Church State for the Establishment which had just been repudiated.

The rapid transformation of English Puritanism into Presbyterianism did less violence to the past than has commonly been supposed. Puritanism had from the beginning of the century represented a conservative force in English religious life.

Through its firm and unshakable devotion to the historical Protestantism of the National Establishment it had come to enjoy the support of large sections of English opinion which were vigorously opposed to the Arminian efforts to pervert the Elizabethan conception of the Church. The quarrel of Puritanism with ecclesiastical authority had been concerned not with doctrine but with externals, which Anglicanism had declared to be matters of convenience and which the Puritans regarded as divinely ordained. Archbishop Laud had endeavoured to establish, by an authority which was certainly unconnected with the English Reformation, the *jure divino* character of the episcopacy, thus driving Puritanism to an equally inflexible avowal of the divine prescription for government by presbyteries.

The main stream of Puritan thought moved very rapidly in the critical years 1641–1645 towards outright Presbyterianism. This development received powerful assistance from the Scottish allies of Parliament, who were possessed of an indomitable determination to bestow the blessings of unmitigated Presbyterianism upon England and whose ecclesiastical representatives were both appalled and indignant because of the spawning sects which gave visible evidence that God's work in England was by no means complete. Unfortunately, however, the Scots, whose Church had gained such remarkable cohesion in the crusade against Rome, were unable ever to comprehend either the historical antecedents of English Puritanism or the adaptations which English Presbyterianism must inevitably make in order to maintain the continuity of the religious life of the nation. The classical system, with its pretension of exclusive and divine sanctions, was never to gain a firm foothold amongst the laity in England and its acceptance amongst the clergy was, on the whole, limited to the older Puritan leaders, whose judgment and perspective had been warped in the long and bitter struggle with Laud.

As we have endeavoured to indicate, English Presbyterianism could have made but slight progress had it not been for the strength of Scottish arms in the early years of the War and the fact that it alone offered a principle of order and discipline in a period when the rapid spread of radical sectarianism deeply disturbed sober and responsible men. But those who had embraced Presbyterianism, whether for political or spiritual ends, speedily sought to give to it a definition and a meaning which outraged the pious sensibilities of the Scots quite as much as did the unchecked excesses of the sects. Parliament made it almost brutally clear that the Church which it envisaged was Erastian in character, that its government was to be lay in spirit, and that its discipline was to be so shorn as to deprive it of any but a vague resemblance to the classical model. Presbyterianism struck its roots in England a full generation too late. A widely dispersed Erastianism denied it effective authority, while an enlarging body of tolerant opinion assailed its claims to exclusive truth and denounced its almost insolent bigotry.

The brief period of Presbyterian dominance in the religious life of England would thus appear to have rested almost wholly upon the political exigencies which made the assistance of Scottish arms so essential to the parliamentary cause. But the leaders of Presbyterian thought ignored the tenuous basis of their prestige to elaborate without reservation the nature and the limits of the exclusive ecclesiastical system which they proposed to erect in England. A kind of nobility accrues to a minority faction which, reckless of consequences, proceeds with cold logic to lay the basis of the church structure and the system of doctrine which the will of God requires and which evil men have too long thwarted. As Henson has suggested, few religions in a minority position have attempted with such vigour to destroy all other faiths.[1] The high confidence which invests the elect, the certainty which endows one who finds in the Bible the literal commandment of God, and the absolute devotion of the Calvinist to a religious frame which he believed necessary to a good life drove Presbyterianism forward to announce a programme for England which repelled sensitive men and which fused Erastianism and sectarianism into an alliance dedicated to the principle of religious toleration and quite effective for the ultimate destruction of the Presbyterian ideal. The Presbyterians could not perceive that their programme would have plunged England into a religious war whose outcome might well have been the destruction of national life. The structure of faith in England had grown too complex; sectarianism had established itself too securely; disbelief and rationalism had permeated too widely; and the contemptuous distrust of Erastianism for the clergy had gripped too deeply for classical Presbyterianism ever to establish itself as the exclusive Church in England.

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[1] Henson, H. H., *Studies in English Religion in the Seventeenth Century* (L., 1903), 236–238.

Orthodox Presbyterianism was unable because of the very essence of its ideology to make the necessary accommodations to the realities of the English religious and political situation. Since it enjoyed no more than a minority status, though the ability and conviction of its leadership gave it an overwhelming, if temporary, prestige in the confused years following the outbreak of civil war, its only hope lay in the establishment of a Presbyterian National Church so far modified as to include within reasonably comprehensive limits the Independents who differed from the Genevan Model only in their views on church government. Another possible choice lay in the acceptance of a sectarian status in a religious establishment which guaranteed spiritual liberty to all those communions which stemmed from the broad and thrifty trunk of Calvinism. Neither of these choices could be adopted by the Presbyterian leaders of the Westminster Assembly since they constituted a negation of the Calvinistic conception of the Church, offered encouragement to erroneous views which manifestly should be suppressed, and would, in any event, destroy the unanimity which must prevail with the Church of Scotland. The older Presbyterian leaders persistently declined to make the compromise with necessity; they maintained relentlessly the claim that Presbyterianism should be established as the exclusive faith, while demanding the destruction of the sects at a time when sectarianism was imposing upon England a measure of religious peace by means of religious toleration.

The irreconcilable and stubborn consistency of the extremist leaders resulted in an inevitable cleavage within English Presbyterianism which was to prove fatal to the dreams of the older leaders. There developed shortly after the close of the Westminster Assembly a moderate, or English, Presbyterian party which stood prepared to recognize the existence of Independency and which was not averse to an intimate union with the Congregationalists in a National Church whose doctrines should be Calvinistic and whose discipline should represent a very considerable curtailment of the Genevan Model.

Richard Baxter, who was perhaps the ablest of the moderate party, was later to present a lucid analysis of the reasons for this most important fissure in Presbyterian thought. The Presbyterians, he maintained, had enjoyed during the period of the Civil Wars a golden opportunity to establish in England a truly catholic Protestant Church. This opportunity was forever dashed when the Presbyterian leaders frightened the sectaries into extremism and revolt by their bigotry and their uncompromising determination to exterminate all dissent.[1] England was thus divided into opposed camps of orthodoxy and sectarianism, preventing any fusion of Protestantism into a moderate and comprehensive Establishment. The Presbyterian extremists were unyielding. "Nothing shorter than the Assemblies Confession of Faith and catechisms, and presbytery, would serve. . . . Their principles were that no others should be tolerated; which set the Independents on contriving how to grasp the sword! They were still crying out on the magistrate that he was irreligious, for suffering sects, and because he did not bring men to conformity."[2] The Presbyterians had proposed to unite the Church upon the fundamentals of faith until their season of power came. Then, as has so often happened, pride and arrogance prevailed in the attempt to fasten upon England an exclusive and narrow uniformity. The very claims of the extremists to catholicity represented nothing more than a sectarian determination to override the conscience and piety of fellow Christians.[3]

This extremely important cleavage in the Presbyterian ranks, quite as much as the triumph of sectarianism, resulted in the rapid drying up of Presbyterian thought after 1649. It is significant that of the 119 titles which will be examined in our discussion of Presbyterian thought, 99 were published prior to 1650, while almost one half of the works published during the Commonwealth and Protectorate were from the pens of moderates. The extremist group made but slight contribution to thought after the establishment of the Commonwealth and it was in fact very rapidly dying out. It should be stressed that of the forty-six Presbyterian writers quoted in these pages all but five were born prior to 1605. The average age of this group at the outbreak of the Civil War was about forty-two. The Presbyterian irreconcilables, in short, had grown to maturity during the Laudian regime; most of them had been deprived or disciplined in his courts; their minds had been cast in the moulds of bigotry by the fires of repression in what must surely be regarded as the most unhappy period in the history of the Church of England. Compromise was impossible for men who during two decades of repression had kept their eyes and their resolution fixed upon the day when power should be delivered through the inscrutable workings of divine Providence into the hands of His elect.

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[1] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 103.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 104.

[3] We have slightly enlarged Baxter's comments.

The moderates were, on the whole, men of a different generation, who attained their maturity during the troubled and uncertain days of civil war. Gillespie, who might well have led the moderate party had it not been for his untimely death in 1648, had been born in 1613. Baxter was ordained just two years before the convention of the Long Parliament. The noble Hodges, whose calm enquiries eventually led him to Anglicanism, was born in 1618. Manton, perhaps the greatest of the Presbyterian liberals, was ordained in 1640. The ranks of the extremists had been thinned by death and infirmity by the time of the Restoration, and the moderates were faced with the Herculean task of convincing England that the spectre of orthodox bigotry no longer dominated the thinking of the communion. A revolt from the awful austerity and literalism of Calvinism had occurred in England which can be compared only with the Arminian revolt that had swept over Holland rather more than a generation earlier.[1] We shall discuss as carefully as possible the thought of the extremist and moderate groups, seeking to assess the relation of each to the development of religious toleration.

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[1] Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 319–349.

B. THE IRRECONCILABLES: ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN (PURITAN) THOUGHT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

We shall now examine in some detail the thought of the extremist Presbyterian leaders. We have indicated that these thinkers made no positive contribution to the development of the principles of religious freedom, but a study of the complexion of their thought is essential for an understanding of the violent reaction to clerical bigotry and ecclesiastical pretension which was to prove so fruitful an impetus to the development of religious toleration.

1. ADAM STEUART

The *Apologeticall Narration* of the dissenting brethren in the Westminster Assembly made it formally clear that an aggressive and rapidly increasing religious communion of the most respectable antecedents was preparing to join the issue with Presbyterianism on the broad question of religious toleration.[1] A storm of abusive protest followed this declaration of the Independent leaders. Among the more sober and thoughtful of the Presbyterian rejoinders were two books: *Some Observations and Annotations upon the Apologeticall Narration* (1643) and *The Second Part of the Duply to M.S.* (1644).[2] Both works, it seems probable, were from the pen of Adam Steuart.[3]

Steuart defended with great zeal the thesis that Presbyterianism represented a system of infallible and exclusive truth from which no dissent could be permitted. The plea of conscience can relieve no man of his due obedience to the godly Church, for that has been the pretext of heresy in all ages.[4] Presbyterianism is the true spiritual order and can permit no variation whatever from its communion. There can be no compromise on this question; "either our brethren do assent to our doctrine, and are resolved likewise to assent to the discipline, which God willing, shall be established by common consent, or do not."[1] Those who differ from the true Church hold tenets contrary to God's Word and may therefore not be tolerated. The Church, if it does not enjoy the support of the civil power, may be compelled to tolerate error for a season, but this is a temporary and unsatisfactory solution awaiting the conversion of the magistrate.[2] For whatever the Church is bound by God's will to repress, it will likewise be the duty of the pious ruler to extirpate.[3] The Christian magistrate can extend a toleration only if he is persuaded that the National Church is corrupt. He exhibits no mercy when he connives at the toleration of heresy. Surely a "magistrate should be worse then mad, that should permit a sect to come into the kingdome, to preach down the Gospel, which he beleeveth."[4] The ruler and the Church should combine in the erection of the true faith and should endeavour by all the means within their disposal to safeguard it from the ravages of heresy and schism.

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[1] *Vide post*, 368–371, for a consideration of this important manifesto.

[2] The *Epistle* of the first edition of *Some Observations* was signed A. S., but was anonymous in the second edition (1644), which we have consulted. The first part of Steuart's *Duply*, published in 1644 under the title *Zerubbabel to Sanbalat and Tobiah*, makes no contribution save an abusive denunciation of the Independent leaders.

[3] The writer has been able to discover nothing concerning the life and career of this interesting author. He commonly referred to himself as "Steuart of Parrodan."

[4] Steuart, Adam, *The second part of the duply to M.S., etc.* (L., 1644), 140.

The Christian magistrate, then, has a positive duty to assist the clergy in the eradication of error. He must buttress the spiritual weapons of the Church with his own coercive power in the interests of righteousness.[5] The prince has a sacred obligation to punish all false prophets, heretics, and schismatics. Steuart followed normal Calvinistic theory in conceding that persecution could effect no positive moral end. Election is in the hands of God, not of men. But the ruler can see to it that God's name and honour are not outraged. He can at least restrain the heretic from "externall acts of idolatry, and other religions, so far forth as death could hinder them. . . ." If the magistrate cannot cure an ill will, he can at least "cut away an ill tongue."[6]

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[1] Steuart, Adam, *The second part of the duply to M.S., etc.*, 141.

[2] *Ibid.*, 159–166.

[3] "Neither is the Christian magistrate lesse bound to put it out of the state, then the presbytery to put it out of the church." (*Ibid.*, 166.)

[4] *Ibid.*, 166.

[5] *Ibid.*, 14, 18.

[6] *Ibid.*, 18.

The writer based his position upon the usual Calvinistic arguments drawn from the Old Testament. "God in the Old Testament granted no toleration of divers religions, or disciplines; and the New Testament requireth no lesse union amongst Christians, then the Old amongst the Jews."[1] Indeed, the responsibility of the Christian magistrate for the purity of the Church is clearly greater than that of the Jewish kings, for "the holier our covenant is, and the further it surpasses the old, so much the greater should the civill magistrates care be, to maintaine it by his civill power."[2] The strength of the civil arm alone stands in the way of spiritual anarchy and the ruin of the Church in England. The existing licence endangers the basis even of the civil power.[3] Discipline must be restored and heresy restrained. The Church will cast the heretics from its bosom with its spiritual weapons, calling upon the ruler to crush them with civil pains.[4]

The case for the persecution of dissent appeared unanswerable to Steuart. The violation of the bonds of godly uniformity is a serious offence. If a man's conscience be erroneous, "the civill magistrate doth him no wrong to endeavour, that he . . . be sufficiently convicted; and, if after sufficient conviction, he will not be quiet . . . but will still trouble both church, and state; wherefore, on Gods name should he not be punished? Is it not better, that such a man should perish, then that he should make thousands to perish?"[5] The State has no choice but to punish an error which is wilfully held. The threat and the whip of the magistrate accomplish the double end of instructing and restraining the heretical and of preserving the godly from the contamination of error.[6]

The principal difference separating Independency from Presbyterianism in the first decade of the revolutionary era was to be found not on the question of the treatment of error but in the definition of error. The Independents were so far advanced as to insist that those communions that had sprung from Calvinistic sources must be regarded as embracing religious truth, while outside this rather narrow bound of comprehension lay forbidden quagmires of error. The Presbyterians, however, insisted upon the completely exclusive character of their system. They demanded that men should lend loyalty not only to its doctrinal tenets but to its disciplinary and governmental structure as well, since the external fabric of the Church bore God's hall-mark quite as decisively as did its dogma. Christendom consequently witnessed the amazing spectacle of one sect condemning another as erroneous though the doctrinal differences separating them were as yet barely perceptible.

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[1] Steuart, Adam, *Some observations and annotations upon the Apologeticall Narration, etc.* (L., 1643, *1644*), 62.

[2] Steuart, *The second part of the duply to M.S.*, 25.

[3] *Ibid.*, 28. [4] *Ibid.*, 50. [5] *Ibid.*, 189. [6] *Ibid.*, 190.

Steuart, like all the extremists of his party, discerned no want of charity in this position. Independency, he held, could not be tolerated in England. Not only was it in error but it would "of it self open a door to all sorts of erroneous opinions . . . for if the Independent churches acknowledge no superiour ecclesiasticall power, and that the civill magistrate in good conscience, cannot punish them; then in case any, or many of them fall into heresie, it will open a door to heresie."[1] This remarkable argument would apparently resolve itself into the position that Independency should submit to coercion in order to make the repression of more serious heresies possible. The Independents, and all other sects, must quietly yield to the discipline of the properly established Presbyterian government. The Independents cannot logically claim toleration for themselves unless they are prepared to embrace the impious teaching that it should be extended to all error and unbelief, however vile.[2]

2. EPHRAIM PAGITT, 1575?–1647

The Presbyterians were beset with the awful fear, which is not concealed in Steuart's writings, that Independency would champion toleration as a principle of policy in order to escape from the yoke of the true discipline. It had become evident as early as 1645 that precisely this was occurring. The Presbyterian complaints thereupon became frenzied and their rigidity complete. An Erastian and fickle Parliament delayed the setting up of an effective ecclesiastical government while the sects grew apace in a confusion and anarchy which was distasteful to God and ruinous to His Church. The licence of the extreme sects during these months was viewed with the greatest anxiety by many conservative men and not a few of them lent their support to the Presbyterians as offering the one consistent and explicit programme for reconstituting authority in the religious life of England.

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[1] Steuart, *The second part of the duply to M.S.*, 125.

[2] *Ibid.*, 191 ff.

Amongst them was the distinguished linguist and historian, Ephraim Pagitt. Educated at Oxford and ordained an Anglican priest, Pagitt had been since the outbreak of the war a moderate Royalist and appears to have remained at heart a moderate Anglican.[1] None the less, he now threw his support to the Presbyterians, who alone were prepared to extirpate the spawning sects which were his especial obsession.

Pagitt charged that the breakdown of ecclesiastical authority in England had been followed by complete chaos. "Every one that listeth turneth preacher, as shoo-makers, coblers, button-makers, hostlers and such like, take upon them to expound the holy scriptures, intrude into our pulpits, and vent strange doctrine, tending to faction, sedition, and blasphemie."[2] So deeply has the poison of heresy penetrated that reason and persuasion are no longer effective for the preservation of truth. The magistrate must come to the assistance of the distracted Church. Heresy can be rooted out in England only by exacting the death penalty for those guilty of blasphemous opinions. Nor is this severity without high warrant. "If such as poyson waters and fountains at which men and beasts drinke, deserve capitall punishment, how much more they, that as much as in them lyeth goe about to poyson mens soules." The State has been charged with the preservation of the spiritual welfare of its citizens quite as much as with the protection of their persons. Heresy spreads with the ever-accelerating fury of fire, and like fire it must be quenched absolutely before it grows beyond all control. England must gird herself for the relentless suppression of the innumerable sects which already threaten her peace and the purity of her faith.[1]

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[1] Pagitt was a member of a gentle family of Northamptonshire. Through "some petit employments, he became parson of the church of S. Edmund in Lombard Street . . . London . . . where he continued many years." (Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, III, 210.) He was deeply distressed by the violence of the Civil War and, favouring neither party, voluntarily retired into the country. It is significant that in 1645 he supported the London petition demanding the erection of a Presbyterian system. (Brook, Benjamin, *The Lives of the Puritans, etc.* (L., 1813), III, 63.)

[2] P., E. [i.e., Pagitt, Ephraim], *Heresiography: or a description of the heretickes and sectaries of these latter times* (L., 1645), *Epist.*

3. JOHN BASTWICK, 1593–1654

The intemperate and irrepressible Bastwick, who enjoyed the reputation of a martyr of dissent,[2] was even franker in his demand that Presbyterianism should seek the complete extermination of the sects. The iniquitous teaching of toleration, the Presbyterian physician held, was responsible for all of England's spiritual ills. God's divine purpose was about to be achieved in England when Satan brought forward this last and most destructive weapon in order to thwart the saints. No religious man can support the teaching. The toleration of error is expressly forbidden by the Bible, and God has ever bestowed his favour upon those nations that have extirpated heresy and idolatry.[3] It is true that in the early days of the Church, when God's will was but dimly revealed and when His saints were beset by heathenism, it was permitted until the Church should gain in strength and maturity.[4] But in these later days no toleration can be extended to iniquity. The Bible makes it clear "that it is a thing highly displeasing unto God, that his people should give a toleration of any religion but that hee hath established."[5] Toleration and moderation can result in no other issue than the ruin of the Church and the triumph of the devil.[6]

We have, furthermore, a very clear commandment for the treatment of heresy and error. Diversity in religion has been expressly forbidden by the Bible, and God's favour will be lent only to the State that endeavours its extermination.[1] Heresy and blasphemy should be punished by death if other means do not prevail, since whatever deserved death under the Law, deserves death under the Gospel—"and therefore . . . atheism, idolatry, blasphemy, profanation of the Sabbath, and all manner of impiety and tolleration of all religions . . . ought by the Christian magistrate to be punished under the Gospel."[2] The magistrate must follow the leadership of the Church in this holy war on impiety. Indeed, if there was ever a time when decisive action was required, it is now when England is overrun with errors and when dissension threatens the very existence of Church and State.[3] The true faith should be erected and all contrary beliefs, no matter how strongly rooted, should be uncompromisingly cut down.[4] Above all else the legal toleration of error must be regarded as a direct insult to the majesty of God.

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[1] Amongst these dangerous heresies Pagitt listed Anabaptism, Brownism, Independency, Familism, the Adamites, the Antinominians, Arminianism, Socinianism, Millenarianism, the Hetheringtonians, the Anti-Sabbatarians, the Traskites, and the Jesuits.

[2] *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 159–161, for a discussion of his earlier career.

[3] Bastwick, John, *The utter routing of the whole army of all the Independents & sectaries, etc.* (L., 1646), 570–573.

[4] Bastwick, John, *Independency not Gods ordinance, etc.* (L., 1645), 148 (mispaged).

[5] Bastwick, *The utter routing of the whole army*, 578.

[6] *Ibid.*, 579–587.

The Presbyterian apologist condemned Independency as the most dangerous and satanic of all the forces which sought to thwart the will of God in England. The fact that the Independents claimed to agree in doctrine with the godly only served to mask the viciousness of their heresy. He therefore branded them as "the most uncertaine; so in that, the most dangerous sect that ever came into the world, since the sunne and moone ruled over the earth."[5] They have distorted and perverted history, truth, and scripture in their efforts to confirm and advance their ruinous tenet of toleration.[6] The vicious fruit of their teachings has been the multiplication of sects in England from three or four to more than forty. Moreover, Independency has been the foul breeding-ground of all other sects. The doctrine of toleration constitutes the rotten core of their faith. They "preach up their own novelties," seeking by an "hereticall doctrine" to gain the support of all those who fear and hate God. Under the cloak of liberty of conscience they seek to butcher the Presbyterians, to raise up tumults in the state, and to gain mastery for their own impious ends.[1] The clear commandment of God requires the immediate extirpation of the sect by the united efforts of the Church with the assistance of the coercive weapons of the magistrate.

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[1] Bastwick, *Independency not Gods ordinance*, 147–148.

[2] Bastwick, John, *The second part of that book call'd Independency not Gods ordinance, etc.* (L., 1645), *Pref.*

[3] *Ibid.*, *Pref.; The utter routing of the whole army*, 600–601.

[4] Bastwick, *The utter routing of the whole army*, 602.

[5] Bastwick, *The second part*, 36.

[6] Bastwick, *Independency not Gods ordinance*, 146–147.

4. THOMAS EDWARDS, 1599–1647

The rapid spread of sectarianism in the New Model during 1645 and the steady extension of the alliance of the Erastians with the sects aroused in the Presbyterians the most violent horror. They saw the hopes of orthodoxy being dashed at the very moment of its triumph and they were wholly outraged by the increasing independence and anti-clericalism of Parliament. The most vigorous and forcible of the Presbyterian apologists waging a relentless war on the doctrine of toleration during these years was unquestionably Thomas Edwards. Edwards, who had been educated at Queens' College, Cambridge, had entered the clergy shortly after his graduation. He was from the beginning an extreme Puritan and his fearless attacks upon Arminianism and his pronounced nonconformity kept him in chronic difficulties with the ecclesiastical authorities.[2] He was one of the most violent of the enemies of episcopacy, but the Church had scarcely been destroyed when he discovered in the doctrine of religious toleration a new and even more insidious enemy of the Church of God. He was a Presbyterian of the most pronounced type, and sought by all the means at his command to destroy those forces which shortly after 1640 began to sap the vitality of Calvinism. Edwards became the crusader at large for Presbyterianism, holding no permanent charge and rallying the forces of orthodoxy when breaches were threatened in the exclusive structure which his colleagues in the Assembly were endeavouring to rear. His writings exerted a very considerable influence during the period of the Civil Wars and cannot be dismissed as mere vituperation. "Though he writes . . . in a kind of vertigo, he nevertheless sees and expresses more vividly than do less hysterical writers the actual color of the time."[1] But his effectiveness as a pamphleteer was vitiated by the fact that "his bitterness and enmity against toleration rose almost to madness,"[2] and the very scurrility of his attacks upon Independency was unquestionably to redound to the benefit of sectarianism. Both his judgment and his charity had been sacrificed to fanatical zeal. Shortly before the Independents gained ascendancy in England, Edwards retired to Holland, though his safety does not appear to have been threatened. He died abroad shortly afterwards.

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[1] Bastwick, *The second part*, *Pref.*; *The utter routing of the whole army*, 608.

[2] *D.N.B.*; Brook, *Lives of the Puritans*, III, 83–84.

Edwards gave a systematic and forcible defence to the view that Presbyterianism represented an exclusive religious system, resting upon infallibly ascertained religious truth. From such a pattern of absolute truth the civil authority should permit not the slightest deviation.[3] The magistrate is commanded by God to maintain truth and to suppress heresy.[4] The highest attribute of his calling is to be found in the services which he renders to the Church in the extirpation of error.[5] Edwards insisted, in the sternest periods, that the judicial laws of the Old Testament still bind the magistrate under the gospel. Those who hold the contrary "must prove from the Scripture those lawes of God revoked and cancel'd, which none of the patrons of toleration have ever yet done."[6] When spiritual agencies fail, the ruler must resort to physical punishment which may serve a salutary purpose in bringing an heretic to his senses, and which is, in any event, required for the preservation of the purity of the Church.[7] The ruler should have no fear that the decisions of the Church do not rest upon truth infallibly ascertained. For "there is an infallibilitie and certaintie under the new [dispensation] also in the doctrines of faith and worship, and Christian magistrates may infallibly and certainly know such and such doctrines to be false, and such true. . . ."[8] To deny this truism is to repudiate the very foundations of our faith. For the godly have in the Bible an infallible guide which is the voice of God Himself.[1] Divine truth is easily and completely ascertainable in fundamental matters, while in doubtful questions a synod of pious and learned men may resolve doubt into truth.[2] Therefore, "ministers and synods in their interpretations and decisions going according to the Word of God, which is infallible, judge infallibly. . . ."[3] For a man who is directed by infallible truth in arriving at his decisions will determine infallibly though his personal judgment be wholly fallible.

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[1] Haller, William, *Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution* (N.Y., 1934), I, 81.

[2] Brook, *Lives of the Puritans*, III, 85–86.

[3] Edwards, Thomas, *The casting down of the last and strongest hold of Satan. Or, a treatise against toleration and pretended liberty of conscience, etc.* (L., 1647), 2–5.

[4] *Ibid.*, 8–13.

[5] *Ibid.*, 34 ff.

[6] *Ibid.*, 55 (mispaged for 56).

[7] *Ibid.*, 64 ff.

[8] *Ibid.*, 147.

No more arrogant or logical defence of an exclusive church system has ever been advanced. Edwards's premises and conclusions were accepted as axiomatic by the extreme Presbyterian group and explain the complete inflexibility of a party which chose to incur ruin rather than compromise with a relativism which it regarded, quite correctly, as fatal to the ancient ideal of a catholic uniformity. Calvinism in England was facing precisely those forces of relativism and doubt which the Church in Holland had met earlier in the century. The results of the titanic struggle in Holland had been fatal at once to Calvinistic orthodoxy and to the uniformity and discipline of the Church of God. Calvinism was waging in England its last and most desperate battle in the effort to retain its pristine vitality. Compromise would have been treason to God and to the Church. The Presbyterians understood correctly that the gravest issue involved in the gigantic struggle with error lay in the dangerous and divisive forces which the principle of religious toleration had engendered. Calvinism took its stand upon the rock of infallibility and sought with a logic which was now becoming little short of hysterical to compel the State to assist it in the eradication of those sects visibly coalescing in opposition upon the teaching of religious liberty.

Edwards suggested, indeed, that the advocacy of the pernicious doctrine of toleration might be taken *ipso facto* as irrefutable proof of heresy and sectarianism. For sectarianism of all types was rallying around the erroneous tenet of religious liberty. He charged, for example, that a meeting of several sects had been held at which all "were agreed and held together for pretended liberty of conscience, the Independents as well as the others holding together with the rest of the sects, as buckle and thong; some professing . . . it was the sin of this kingdom that the Jewes were not allowed the open profession and exercise of their religion amongst us. . . ."[1] The Independents, he alleged, were evidently seeking to accomplish the ruin of the Church by uniting all those who opposed Presbyterianism for the defence of the principle of toleration. They had sought by every artifice to delay the erection of the Church, being fully aware that delay would strengthen the hands of the enemies of Presbyterianism.[2] The very existence of the Church had been threatened at the moment of its creation. "Its a sad thing to think that so much blood hath been spilt, and vast sums of money spent, if in the end we should have a toleration."[3]

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[1] Edwards, *The casting down of the last and strongest hold of Satan*, 149.

[2] *Ibid.*, 151–153.

[3] *Ibid.*, 154.

England can be saved from the anarchy and ruin of sectarianism only by the immediate erection of a firm Presbyterian government. If this is not done the State itself will be dissolved in the eventual holocaust of religious licence. England has entrusted to an Assembly of able and pious men the task of framing the constitution of the true Church. This having been done, Parliament should "by their power and authority . . . bind men to the decrees of the Assembly; and not . . . to tolerate any other doctrines, churches, worship or government . . ."[4] Any other course would deliver the land over to schism and would violate the sacred vows which England has undertaken in the Covenant.[5] This pious action must be speedily inaugurated. "This land is become already in many places a chaos, a Babel, another Amsterdam, yea, worse, we are . . . in the high way to Munster."[6] A continuation of the licentious liberty which the Independents demand can only result in the utter ruin of religion, for toleration "hath all errors in it, and all evils, it is against the whole stream and current of Scripture

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[1] Edwards, Thomas, *The first and second part of Gangraena: or a catalogue and discovery of many of the errors, heresies, blasphemies and pernicious practices of the sectaries of this time, etc.* (L., 1646), i, 12.

[2] Edwards, Thomas, *Reasons against the Independent government of particular congregations: as also against the toleration of such churches, etc.* (L., 1641), *Epist.*, *Intro.*

[3] Edwards, *Gangraena*, i, 42.

[4] Edwards, Thomas, *Antapologia: or, a full answer to the Apologeticall narration, etc.* (L., 1644, *1646*), 238.

[5] *Ibid.*, 238–240.

[6] Edwards, *Gangraena*, i, 57.

. . . it overthrows all relations, both political, ecclesiastical, and oeconomical."[1]

The demand for liberty of conscience which now plagues England, Edwards argued with considerable violence to history, was novel. The devil has launched it in a final desperate effort to prevent the erection of the godly Church in the realm.[2] The devil's sinister purposes have been well rewarded. It has in all ages been customary for pious Christians to recoil in horror from the sight of heresy. But now England beholds the spectacle of the Independents defending liberty of conscience for all manner of blasphemers, pleading that "errors of the minde are not so dangerous as practices!, that Arrians who live honestly may be saved; yea, all men and all creatures shall be saved at last! Who ever thought seven years ago he should have lived to have heard or seen such things preached and printed in England?"[3]

Never in Christian annals has there been such a toleration of error and heresy as the pious have beheld in England since the wars began. The heretics are even permitted to disturb and attack the churches by law established, to disseminate their opinions without hindrance, and to plunge the realm into confusion and division.[4] Indeed, "the liberty the sectaries now have in England is rather a domination then a toleration, a raigne rather then a sufferance."[5] Sectarian insolence has passed the limits of Christian and civil endurance. England must carefully assess the effects of the disintegrative licence which is now permitted. Religious toleration will weaken the very foundations of the kingdom. "Different formes of churches and church-government in one state must needs lay a foundation of strife and division therein."[6] Religious liberty "will spoile any church and government; if presbyteriall government be setled, and a toleration given in this land; that will marre all. . . ."[7] The State, the ministry, the Church, God's truth—all will fall before the cancerous growth of this malignant teaching.[8] With savage eloquence Edwards predicted "that if the sectaries shall be still suffered to go on and all kinds of errors and opinions vented for the future, as they have been for these three or foure last years, this will be such a thing as never was read or heard of in any age, or among any people, that the end and issue of a solemne nationall covenant made with God another kingdome and one another for reformation, should end in a universall toleration and confusion both in church and state."[1]

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[1] Edwards, *Gangraena*, i, 58.

[2] *Ibid.*, i, 59–60.

[3] *Ibid.*, i, 75.

[4] *Ibid.*, iii, 268–269.

[5] *Ibid.*, iii, 270.

[6] Edwards, *Antapologia*, 247.

[7] *Ibid.*, 252–253.

[8] Edwards, *Reasons against the Independent government*, 3 ff.

Presbyterianism faced, so Edwards and many of his coreligionists sincerely believed, not only a trial of strength with the forces demanding toleration but a mortal struggle with the sects for dominance in England. The goal of a true National Church had by no means been attained. The theory of toleration had opened breaches in the defences of Presbyterianism which might well prove fatal to its very existence. Though the sects pleaded for a mere toleration now, the evidence of history confirmed the opinion that once they had gained liberty they would proceed to attempt the extirpation of the true faith.[2] Presbyterianism must therefore strike first and decisively in the interests of self-preservation, if not of piety. Edwards solemnly warned England that "in all ages hereticks and sectaries at their first rising, when but a few and weake have cryed for toleration . . . but when by being let alone they have grown to great numbers, and by their industry, subtilty and activity have got power in their hands, then they have been the greatest persecutors of all others, denying all liberty to the orthodox. . . ."[3] Truth must not submit itself as a pawn to the caprice of error. The godly cannot expose the sacred institutions of Church and State to the risk of ruin and disintegration. For "no man knowes where these sectaries will stop or stay, or to what principles they will keep . . . God keep me and all true Presbyterians from that liberty of conscience the sectaries would give us if we lay at their mercy, and liberty of conscience were theirs to give."[4]

Edwards had called his Calvinistic colleagues to a holy crusade against the disintegrative forces which he saw playing so powerfully and destructively in the English religious scene. Presbyterian orthodoxy erred in ascribing the rapid spread of sectarianism to the stimulating influence of the doctrine of religious toleration, which was rather a by-product of the individualism and spiritual anarchy engendered by the dissolution of ecclesiastical authority. The Calvinists were keenly sensitive to the supreme importance of the remarkable deterioration of orthodoxy which had occurred in England during the decade following the outbreak of civil war. Drastic repression and awful penalties alone could check the rot which was crumbling the edifice of God's Church before their horrified eyes. Concern gave way to desperation, and desperation in turn to an hysteria which carried Presbyterian thought into a bigoted vacuum of theory which shrilly refused to recognize the realities of the English religious situation. Laud's system of repression had fallen in ruins largely because there were dissenting forces which no ecclesiastical authority could longer control. For Presbyterianism to essay the same coercive policy, without warrant of tradition, without virtue of dominance in the religious life of the nation, without consideration for the welter of blood and confusion into which England would have been plunged had it been seriously undertaken, though it may bespeak sublime confidence in God's truth and in the infallibility of the truth as defined by the Westminster Assembly, was sheer madness. Puritanism had forsaken its fine conviction that religious truth must prevail over error by the weight of its own majesty and overwhelming reality. It had grasped the sword, and was to perish by the sword.

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[1] Edwards, *Gangraena*, iii, 271.

[2] Edwards, *Antapologia*, 236.

[3] Edwards, *Gangraena*, iii, 271.

[4] *Ibid.*, iii, 175 (mispaged for 275).

5. ROBERT BAYLIE, 1599–1662

Robert Baylie, the eminent and learned historian of the Westminster Assembly, retained an objectivity which makes his comments upon the question of religious toleration particularly valuable as a reflection of the staunchly Presbyterian temper.[1] At the same time, his careful criticism of English

[1] Baylie was educated at Glasgow, the place of his birth. He was ordained according to the episcopal rites, but by 1638 his dislike of the Laudian innovations in Scotland combined with his implacable hatred of Arminianism had driven him into the ranks of the Presbyterians. Shortly after his appointment to the chair of divinity at Glasgow he was designated a member of the Westminster Assembly. We have frequently referred previously to his

sectarianism remains perhaps the ablest and most damaging Presbyterian document of the period.

England, Baylie submitted, must choose between order and chaos in the settlement of its national religion. It should strive to effect a uniformity resting upon truth rather than upon the uncertain pillars of accommodation. And above all Parliament should so far shun the prodigious impiety of religious toleration as to "abhorre the very naming of it."[1] For error is just as sinful and dangerous as vice. It follows that it is more, or at least, "no lesse unlawfull for a Christian state to give any libertie or toleration to errours, then to set up in every citie and parish of their dominions, bordels for uncleannenesse, stages for playes, and lists for duels." Freedom to err is no less repugnant to God than licence to commit unnatural sins and crimes.[2] The speedy institution of Presbyterianism is the only remedy efficient to purge England of the plague of heresy.

The realm, Baylie held, was overrun and the Church threatened with a variety of gross errors that had never been equalled in Christian history. England was gripped by an ecclesiastical anarchy by which "Christ is robbed of a great part of his kingdom in this land."[3] "The hedge of discipline lying level with the ground, makes open doors, yea, invites and calls for all the devouring beasts to prey on the flock of Christ."[4] Responsible men have pleaded for a toleration of errors which it must be admitted destroy the soul itself. These men demand the right to "embrace Mahomets Alcoran, the Jewish Talmud, the fables of the pagan poets, in place of the Old and New Testaments, for the everlasting destruction of their souls."[5] The land is already swarming with strange sects but these men

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Letters and Journals, written from London, which constitute our most valuable source of information concerning the work and internal conflicts of the Assembly of Divines. A conservative Presbyterian, Baylie was outraged by the execution of the king and the triumph of the sects in England, becoming, indeed, a moderate royalist. He was appointed principal of Glasgow University at the time of the Restoration.

[1] Baylie, Robert, *A dissuasive from the errours of the time, etc.* (L., 1645), *Epist. Dedic.*

[2] Baylie, Robert, *Errours and induration, are the great sins and the great judgements of the time* (L., 1645), *Epist.*

[3] *Ibid.*, 21.

[4] *Ibid.*, 24.

[5] Baylie, Robert, *Anabaptism, the true fountaine of Independency, Brownisme, Antinomy, Familisme, etc.* (L., 1646, *1647*), *Epist.*

would throw the flood-gates completely open.[1] Indeed, these men have even been emboldened to deny the authority of the civil magistrate to order religion and to set up a truly reformed Church of Christ. They forget that all Christians are bound to "quench the fire of heresie and schism," and that England, in particular, has pledged itself "to extirpate heresie and schism, and whatsoever shall be found contrary to sound doctrine, without respect of persons."[2]

Baylie held that the Church in England was menaced by two mortal enemies: the Independents and the Baptists. The Independents have by their tenacious and wilful devotion to the congregational theory of church government weakened the foundations of the Church and have encouraged the appalling spread of sects.[3] They have moved steadily and rapidly towards the defence of the universal toleration of religious error. Already they deny the right of the State to punish heresy save in cases of wilful error in the fundamentals of faith. "This will conclude the power of the magistrate in matters of religion in a pretty narrow compasse," yet it at least leaves to the Church the defence of its very citadel.[4] But Independent theory cannot rest here. It will be forced on by the demands of its heretical allies to the avowal of complete licence.

The Independents, Baylie charged, have displayed amazing and ominous inconsistencies of theory which mark them as unsafe for the exercise of power. No sect, he astutely remarked, has been as vociferous in demanding that the State punish by death moral offences like adultery, blasphemy, sabbath-breaking, and idolatry. Is it not probable, he enquired, that if their season of power comes they will include not only pagans and papists, but Protestants who differ from them in their moral preconceptions?[5] The Scot here drove his barb of logic deep into the Achilles heel of the Independent position. Inheriting from Puritanism a zealous and wholly bigoted preoccupation with public and private morals, Independency was before the end of the decade to persecute men upon the grounds of morality while defending most nobly the abstract right of religious toleration.

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[1] Baylie, *Errours and induration*, 26; *Anabaptism*, Pref.

[2] Baylie, *Errours and induration*, 26.

[3] Baylie, *Anabaptism*, Pref.

[4] *Ibid.*, 54–55.

[5] Baylie, *A dissuasive*, 31.

Nor was Baylie certain that the defence of religious toleration by the Independents rested upon grounds of pure theory and religious right. They proclaim the absolute freedom of the human conscience and deny to the State any authority to employ coercive weapons in the defence of religious truth.[1] But has this theory not stemmed from their hatred of Presbyterianism and from the requirements of their alliance with even more extreme sects? Baylie, like all of the Presbyterian apologists, bit deeply into the pretensions of the Independents by pointing out that in New England, where they enjoyed the support of the civil State, they had not been backward in exacting the extreme penalty for idolatry and false prophecy. Have they not proved under ideal conditions that if they should come to dominance a spiritual tyranny might well ensue? They expose themselves to the charge of complete inconsistency when they hold that it is godly to persecute in New England but impious to persecute in England.

The Baptists, Baylie held, had at least been consistent in their advocacy of religious toleration. In fact, so extreme were their views that England would probably never have been contaminated by them had they not found shelter under the wing of the liberty of conscience which the Independents had proclaimed.[2] They have unreservedly denied any ecclesiastical power to the magistrate and have advocated a complete toleration for all religious beliefs.[3] "This liberty they extend not only to errors lockt up in the hearts, but also when they are openly by word and writ professed, yea solemnly preached," thus extending universal freedom to the dissemination of the most deadly heresies.

These sects have gained many adherents, and the devotion to the principle of toleration which they profess is widespread. They have arraigned Presbyterianism for severity and persecution, and the erection of the true Church in England has foundered on the rock of toleration which they have reared. And yet, Baylie pertinently enquired, can any zealous sect be genuinely devoted to the ruinous principle of toleration? He wondered "whether in their inmost sense they can maintain so catholick a liberty to all persons in matters of religion; or if haply some piece of policy may not induce them to strike so much upon this string at the present, when they have but small hopes of attaining a liberty for themselves without the assistance of many others, from whom they differ in many particulars of religion."[1] England must choose, Baylie suggested, between the righteous zeal and godly discipline of the Presbytery and the uncertain tolerance of sects that have never known the responsibilities of power.

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[1] Baylie, *A dissuasive*, 127.

[2] Baylie, *Anabaptism*, 17–18.

[3] *Ibid.*, 55–56.

Baylie, who had perhaps followed the development of Independency more closely and intelligently than any of his colleagues, was deeply pessimistic about the future of the Church in England. As early as April 1644, he had confided, in terms and under circumstances strikingly reminiscent of More's remarks a century earlier,[2] that "the sights I see here dailie will make me the more willing, all the days of my life, in all humilitie of mind, to live in peace as a servant to any tolerable creature."[3] England appeared to be embracing, without compulsive necessity, a policy which had made Holland "infamous in the Christian world."[4] The sects were daily gaining in strength and a vigorous demand for religious liberty was sweeping the nation. Presbyterianism, he was almost prepared to concede, must adjust itself to realities. He sought therefore to clear his party of the charge of harshness. With one blow he almost destroyed the logical basis for persecution by reflecting that no man knows but that the sectaries are set apart by God for mercy and salvation. In any case, if those who err are in God's wisdom damned, the Church can only look upon them with compassion.[5]

Baylie's reflections upon the climate of English religious opinion are gloomy. The triumph of God's Church has been delayed by the Erastian intrigues of Parliament. Sectarianism has grown apace and, rooting itself in the insidious doctrine of religious toleration, may prevail against the godly. The Scot's analytical mind probed deeply into the weakness and irresponsibility of extreme sectarianism. He raised valid questions concerning the probable conduct of the enthusiasts once they had attained their season of power. He feared that their present devotion to the principle of religious liberty might flow from the exigencies of their existing minority position, doubting whether their devotion could survive for long the intoxication of power. He reminded England of her covenanted vows and cautioned her not to forsake the godly severity of classical Presbytery to wander in the uncharted swamps of universal toleration.

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[1] Baylie, *Anabaptism*, 58.

[2] Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, I, 47.

[3] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 173.

[4] Baylie, *Errours and induration*, 27.

[5] Baylie, *Anabaptism*, Pref.

6. Samuel rutherford, 1600–1661

There was in Baylie's philosophy an objectivity and a sense of reality hardly typical of the extremist Presbyterian thinkers. More representative of this school of thought were the writings of Samuel Rutherford, perhaps the keenest intellect in the Presbyterian party.[1] Rutherford faced the issue of toleration and dissent from the godly Church with a fearless disregard for the consequences of his reasoning. He denied absolutely the philosophical and moral principles underlying religious toleration and gave to the outworn theory of the exclusive Church a stubbornly magnificent vindication.

Rutherford was unyielding in his claims that Presbyterianism represented the Church of God from which there could be not the slightest deviation. God has appointed an exclusive Church, and His voice, will, and saving grace minister solely to that community. Salvation is not possible outside that Church, since God does not dwell there. This Church, speaking in its lawful assemblies, is the sole rule and guide of conscience.[1] From its pronouncements there is no appeal, and wilful digression from it is heresy. Man's conscience is God-given and, if tender, should be respected. But the wilful conscience may not be permitted to override truth or to breed dissension.[2] The lawful assemblies of the Church may pronounce infallibly in controversial questions of dogma since they have to guide them the living Word of God and the direction of the Holy Ghost. The formal conscience of the Church must prevail over the preoccupations of the individual conscience. For God has ordained that His Word shall be sufficiently clear for the fallible Church to determine infallibly the fundamentals of belief. He has invested the synods of the Church with an exclusive and infallible power to define truth, and all men are bound by their decisions.[3] The officers of the Church declare the mind and will of Christ, just as judges, in interpreting the law, declare the mind and will of the king. To deny this principle would be to engulf Christendom in spiritual anarchy, to raze the foundations of Christian discipline, and to exalt the individual will above the will of God. Presbyterianism, Rutherford submitted, has been declared to be the true religion of England and it must undertake without fear or compromise the discharge of its high and exclusive function.

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[1] A Scot by birth, Rutherford was educated at Edinburgh. He was ordained by the moderate Anglican Lamb, entering his pastorate in Galloway in 1627. He was very soon regarded as the foremost preacher in that region. Rutherford was an outspoken critic of Arminianism and, after successive disputes with the ecclesiastical authorities, was silenced in 1636. He retired abroad where he continued his assaults upon the Laudian innovations. He was appointed to the Westminster Assembly in 1643, living in London for about four years. During this time he preached steadily and wrote voluminously. Upon his return to Scotland he was appointed principal of Saint Mary's College, Saint Andrews. Rutherford was an uncompromising enemy of Cromwell and Independency, refusing to make the slightest concession to what he denounced as sinful nonconformity and schism. His inordinate zeal and fiery temper occasionally caused his able books to descend to scurrility.

Having stated in this unequivocal fashion the exclusive claims of Presbyterianism as the true Church of Christ, Rutherford lent his consideration to the status of the sects under its discipline. English sectarianism, he charged, had sought to contrive a kind of catholicity by advancing the view that all Christians should live in unity of spirit and faith under their several forms of organization, such as prelacy, popery, presbyteries, and Independency.[4] That is to say, they define the Church as the body of the saints dispersed amongst the many sects. This false conception of the Church is widespread; it lies at the basis of the theory of religious toleration; and it has infected persons high in the civil Government.[1]

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[1] Hunt, John, *Religious Thought in England from the Reformation to the End of Last Century* (L., 1870–1873), I, 354.

[2] Rutherford, Samuel, *A free disputation against pretended liberty of conscience tending to resolve doubts moved by Mr. John Goodwin, John Baptist, Dr. Jer. Taylor, the Belgick Arminians, Socinians, . . . contending for lawlesse liberty, or licentious toleration of sects and heresies* (L., 1649), 8–22.

[3] *Ibid.*, 24, 32–33.

[4] Rutherford, Samuel, *A survey of the spirituall Antichrist. Opening the secrets of familisme and antinomianisme, etc.* (L., 1648), 249.

This notion is at once mischievous and heretical. Indeed, Rutherford would go so far as to argue that Independency was manifestly a false and heretical sect. Presbyterianism constitutes the sole true faith, while Independency borders upon atheism in its advocacy of the damnable doctrine of liberty of conscience.[2] "If the Presbyterian pray, as they doe, that God would avert that athesticall [*sic*] plague of liberty of conscience, and extirpate familisme, [and] Socinianisme . . . and [the] Independents pray that God would grant them the grace of liberty of conscience. . . . Can the spirit bestow the same accesse and presence to the praiers of the one as to the other? Have contradictory prayers the same answer from God?"[3] The sects forget that Christ is the head of the visible Church as well as of the invisible.[4] They seek to dissolve the unity and the very fabric of the Church by a capricious claim to a liberty of conscience which the laws of Christ do not allow.

The godly, Rutherford insisted, must not be diverted from their high aim by the sectarian demands or by their specious claim to agreement in the fundamentals of faith. In particular, Independency must be disavowed and put down. This party has openly supported the toleration of admittedly heretical belief. Presbyterianism has been too lax in its treatment of dissent from the godly frame in England. Indeed, the sects have exploited its charity and have abused the might of "Gideons sword." The Independents have achieved strength in England by allying with Erastus "to reach a blow to the Presbyterians." Rutherford demanded that Parliament should immediately enjoin the universal authority of the Covenant in order to repress heresy and schism "when now indulgence and more is yeelded to all heresies, blasphemies and sects, and an army pleading for liberty of conscience to all religions, popery not excepted, is owned and authorised by the Houses."[5]

Rutherford was completely frank in his denial of the doctrine of religious toleration. No warrant can be found for it in the Word. It is clearly nothing less than a covert encouragement to atheism and scepticism.[1] For a toleration of error would destroy all certainty of faith and truth. Every doctrine would be "bottomed on fallible opinions, on doubtfull disputations of scepticks." Complete confusion and anarchy would be its immediate fruit. By its principles conscience would be "made every mans rule, umpire, judge, Bible, and his God, which if he follow, he is but at the worst, a godly, pious, holy hereticke, who feareth his conscience more than his creator. . . ."[2] Presbyterianism disowns both the ethic and the implications of this teaching. Its opposition to the permission of liberty of conscience is not held in harshness but in conscience. It regards the teaching that the ruler may not wield the sword against blasphemy and heresy as sheer atheism.[3] It holds that such a principle relegates the Word and its disciples to the caprice of individual interpretation. It must disown and oppose the destructive forces which have been released by this perfidious doctrine. For "God hath not left men at freedome to follow the dictates of conscience at will, which often is conceit, not conscience. . . ."[4] Presbyterianism must rally to the defence of the absolute truth which it represents, refusing to be ensnared in the plausible but deadly pleas for peace, moderation, and toleration which the enemies of Christ advance to accomplish the overthrow of His Church. For the doctrine of toleration cultivates and emphasizes a sceptical spirit concerning the certainties of revealed truth. It questions the infallibility of the necessary truths with which God has endowed His Church. It destroys man's faith in the Bible, denies the power of the Church to maintain its very unity and doctrine, and decries that certainty of faith which resides at the very basis of election.

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[1] Rutherford, Samuel, *A survey of the spirituall Antichrist*, 250.
[2] *Ibid.*, 251.
[3] *Ibid.*, 252–253.
[4] *Ibid.*, 255.
[5] *Ibid.*, Epist.

Rutherford's defence of the doctrine of persecution rested solidly and logically upon the foundations of his thought. He posed a resolute and unrelieved defence of the right and duty of repression which displays the complete inflexibility of orthodox Calvinistic theory. An heretic, the Scottish author held, is technically guilty of soul murder and should accordingly be cut down by the civil magistrate under the guidance of the Church. Admittedly, the sword of the ruler cannot reach the soul or compel belief. Conversion rests in the hands of God, not of man.[1] No efficacy is claimed, or desired, in the repression of the heretic. The sword is an external agent which prevents heresy from destroying others and which guards the Law of God and His Church from the impious assaults of error. Heresy is an insult to the majesty of God which the scriptures clearly require us to avenge. There is but one true Church and all who are outside it are heretics who must be destroyed.

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[1] Rutherford, *A free disputation*, 145–146.

[2] *Ibid.*, Pref.

[3] Rutherford, *A survey of the spirituall Antichrist*, Epist.

[4] *Ibid.*, 259.

The theory here advanced displays an almost brutal intolerance. As we have previously had occasion to indicate, the Calvinists were obliged to renounce the moral efficacy of persecution since it did violence to the doctrine of predestination. They could not argue, it also follows, that the elect could be contaminated by the virus of error. They could advance no ethical theory to justify religious repression, yet they were impelled by their sense of the immediacy of God, their terror of the awful sin of blasphemy, and their literal and exclusive conception of the Church, to strike down those who were mired in error. They would persecute, not in order to save the heretic or to protect the elect, but to avenge God. As Rutherford put it, the question is "not touching opinions . . . the speaking, professed holding of them, publishing, teaching, printing, and known and externall persuading of others to be of our minde."[2] For the sword may not be used to compel faith; it is rather "a means negatively to punish acts of false worship."[3] The magistrate is required to punish all those who maintain teachings contrary to the fundamentals of Christianity[4]—thus seducers, idolaters, blasphemers, and false teachers should suffer death.[5] Moreover, even errors in the non-fundamentals of ceremony and discipline should be punished if they are obstinately held.[6]

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[1] Neither the magistrate nor his sword "is hereby made a means, way, or cause of conversion of soules, or propagating the Gospel." Rutherford, *A survey of the spirituall Antichrist*, 261.

[2] Rutherford, *A free disputation*, 46.

[3] *Ibid.*, 51, *et cf. A survey of the spirituall Antichrist*, 273.

[4] Rutherford, *A free disputation*, 61–63.

[5] *Ibid.*, 182–187, 298.

[6] *Ibid.*, 61–63.

England had recoiled in horror from the awful austerity of the Presbyterian conception of national religious life. The Calvinist was serene and completely confident in his conviction that the Church to which he lent such unquestioning devotion represented the one and the only way of salvation. All outside it, all who assailed it, all who denied its authority were *ipso facto* damned and worthy of extirpation. Presbyterianism was ideologically unable to compromise with historical development. Rutherford's words were penned at a moment when Presbyterianism of the Scottish model stood discredited in England, when men had been driven by the very inelasticity of Calvinism to seek refuge and peace in the doctrine of religious toleration.

7. THE MINOR THEORISTS

The minor Presbyterian thinkers and pamphleteers were even more uncompromising in their opposition to dissent and more rigid in their devotion to an exclusive Presbyterian system than the more important leaders of the party. The orthodox position was developed by these writers in a stream of pamphlets which reached its high point between 1644 and 1648. Following the execution of the king and the triumph of sectarianism in England, Presbyterian thought exhibits evidences of almost complete sterility, of unrelieved pessimism, and of paralysis before the spectacle of a revolution which had swept much farther than the stalwart conservatism of orthodox Calvinism desired.

a. On the Exclusive Nature of the Church

The Presbyterians were gravely distressed by the relativism in English religious thought which had so weakened the conception of an infallible and exclusive Church. This teaching has had the pernicious effect of raising dangerous doubts concerning the nature of both truth and authority.[1] Men have been driven to say, "We know not of what religion to be, and therefore we will be of no religion. If we hold of such, others will condemne us, and if we hold of them, others also will condemne us; and therefore we will rather stand neuters, and professe no religion at all."[1] This atheistical relativism, the Calvinists held, saps the very basis of religious assurance. The Christian ministry can define with absolute assurance the limits of truth and error, since its authority is based upon the clear prescription of the Bible and its judgments are illumined by the Holy Spirit.[2]

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[1] Calamy, Edmund, *An indictment against England because of her selfe-murdering divisions, etc.* (L., 1645), 14.

England had long laboured under the yoke of a tyrannous and ungodly prelacy when the Civil Wars began. So far had the foundations of faith been perverted that many simple and pious men were uncertain in controversial matters of faith.[3] A general assembly was convened which defined and declared God's truth and moulded for the realm the fabric of a Church which contained the exclusive body of religious truth hedged by the walls of a godly discipline.[4] The magistrate has obligated himself to defend it against the assaults of error and to repress all those who dissent from it. England has entered into a solemn covenant with God to erect and sustain that Church.[5] This Church rests upon infallible foundations of truth.[6] All those who will not enter its uniformity or submit to its discipline must be reduced by the arm of the magistrate.[7] The compulsion which undergirds the foundations of the Church is undertaken in the pursuit of a godly and necessary end.[1] It does not aim to win men to Christ, for human power cannot effect that, but to destroy the weeds which pollute the garden. "When the back doth smart under the rod, the ear is opened to discipline and instruction. So that though the rod do not directly convince or persuade; yet it hath its efficacy in the way of work of preparation."[2] No cry of persecution, no plea for moderation, no sinful compromise may delay or impede this holy task. For the pursuit of truth is more precious than the attainment of peace.[3]

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[1] Calamy, *An indictment against England*, 16.

[2] Bedford, Thomas, *An examination of the chief points of antinomianism . . . . [And] an examination of a pamphlet . . . intituled The compassionate Samaritan, etc.* (L., 1647), 76; Brinsley, John, *The araignment of the present schism of the new separation in old England, etc.* (L., 1646), 74.

[3] Calamy, *An indictment against England*, 8–11.

[4] Bakewell, Thomas, *An answer or confutation of divers errors broached and maintained by the seven churches of Anabaptists contained in . . . their confession of faith, etc.* (L., 1646), 45–46.

[5] *The Scots declaration against the toleration of sects and sectaries, and the liberty of conscience, etc.* (L., 1647), 1–5.

[6] See the interesting arguments in *Anti-toleration, or a modest defence of the letter of the London ministers to the reverend Assembly of Divines, etc.* (L., 1646). Since we may be certain of the infallibility of truth we need not fear that we will punish men unjustly. Indeed, a man may be sure of the truth without being able to answer every argument against it. "Martyrs formerly have burnt for that which they cannot dispute. I may know truth to be truth, as certainly as I know the fire to burn." The Church, possessed of an infallible and exclusive truth, should not even deign to answer every specious and malicious teaching of those whom it suppresses.

[7] Calamy, *An indictment against England*, 33; Bakewell, *An answer*, 46; *The Scots declaration*, 5; *Anti-toleration*, 12; *Testimony of ministers of . . . Essex; to the right hon. the Lords and Commons* (L., 1645).

b. On the Role of the Christian Magistrate

The Church, the Presbyterians submitted, is robbed of half its strength unless it enjoys the assistance of the Christian magistrate. The ruler may be disturbed by no fear that he cannot discern between truth and error. For he will be guided by a Church whose doctrine and discipline have been precisely determined by a godly ministry. He may "be assured of some truths in the Christian religion, and their opposite errors."[4] God resides in the bosom of His Church and has promised to direct and guide the perfection of His inscrutable purposes.

The function of the ruler is by no means confined to the repression of the enemies of the Church. He has been charged by God with the maintenance of the clergy, with the advancement of truth, and with the oversight of the external fabric of the Church.[5] He has been appointed to preserve unity and peace in the Church and to see that God's truth is "kept pure and intire . . . all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed: and all the ordinances of God duely settled, administred and observed."[1] The prince will be guided by the clergy in the exercise of these high functions, orthodox Presbyterian theory insisted, though in the dark days of Cromwell's administration it was conceded that he need not "pin his faith upon the synod's sleeve."[2] The Christian ruler will seek to preserve the uniformity of the faith and will regard breaches in it as destructive to the best ends of both Church and State.[3] He will reign in the closest harmony with the Church, and the evil roots of heresy will find no soil in which to strike in the firm cement of the union between Church and State.

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[1] Brinsley, *The araignment*, 73–74; *A testimony of the ministers in the county of Stafford to the trueth of Jesus Christ, and to the solemne league and covenant, etc.* (L., 1648), 5–6.

[2] Bedford, *An examination*, 77.

[3] Ley, John, *The new quere, and determination upon it, by Mr. Saltmarsh lately published, to retard the establishment of the presbyteriall government, examined, etc.* (L., 1646), 40–41.

[4] *An apologie for Mr. Iohn Goodwin, etc.* (L., *1653*), 6.

[5] *Στερέωμα: the establishment, or, a discourse tending to the settling of the minds of men about the power of the civil magistrate in matters of religion and how far it extends, etc.* (L., 1654), 24–25; Cobbet, T., *The civil magistrates power in matters of religion modestly debated, impartially stated according to the bounds and grounds of Scripture, etc.* (L., 1652, *1653*), *Pref.*; Calamy, *An indictment against England*, 37; Sedgwick, Obadiah, *The nature and dangers of heresies, etc.* (L., 1647), 38–39.

The Presbyterian conception of the role of the magistrate in the Christian Church displayed but insignificant deviation from orthodox sixteenth century theory. The uniformity which the true Church desires to impose must be buttressed by the coercive power of temporal authority. Those in error, the good Calvinist admitted, could not be saved by enforced exposure to righteousness, but they could be required to conduct themselves as "formal Christians" and hence restrained from offering indignity to the tender sensibilities of the elect. Consequently the ruler may and should compel all men to the public performance of God's worship.[4] For it is evident that his power is both "coactive and coercive." Those who are without the Covenant must be restrained from profaning it. And those who are within the Covenant must be "not only restrained but also compelled to joyn with the Assembly in the worship of God; if not, they are punnished: Nor is the punishment of these an act of persecution, but a prudent preservation of the power and purity of religion and God's worship."[5]

This inflexible ideal of enforced conformity was defended with a distinction, prominent in the armoury of every persecuting system, which in the setting of the intense sectarianism of English religious life was at once specious and dangerous.

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[1] *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines . . . concerning a confession of faith, etc.* (L., 1647), 42.

[2] *Στερέωμα: the establishment*, 58.

[3] *Master John Goodwins quere's questioned, concerning the power of the civil magistrate in matters of religion, etc.* (L., 1653), 6.

[4] Bakewell, *An answer*, 40.

[5] Bedford, *An examination*, 79.

Those who oppose God's truth will raise the cry of persecution when they are compelled to submit to discipline. But the Church claims and exercises no power to coerce conscience. It replies to the nonconformist: "If thou hast an hereticall opinion, have it to thy selfe, and the magistrate will not; nay, cannot meddle with thy private conscience."[1] Coercion should be employed only when the dissenter attacks the Church, seeks to disseminate his erroneous opinions, or endeavours to systematize them in formal worship.[2] The State, in short, tolerates nonconformity of thought because it cannot apprehend the sentiments which reside in the recesses of men's minds, but it can and should repress completely the tangible evidences of their nonconformity. Not only was this view rigidly intolerant, but it had no standing or reality in English public opinion.

The ruler lends his most salutary and decisive support to the Church by the exercise of his coercive power in the suppression of heresy and error. This power has been vested in him by the clearest divine mandate in the Old Testament, which the rule of the gospel has not revoked.[3] The civil power implements the spiritual penalties of the Church by cutting down those whose impiety and error cannot be cured. Recent developments in England have demonstrated that all discipline is paralysed and spiritual anarchy ensues when the magistrate's sword is sheathed. "There must then be a sword to punish errour, as well as evill doing against the morall law, which even heathen magistrates used the sword against."[4] The civil magistrate is by God's own mandate the keeper of both tables and if he shall not draw forth the sword which God put in his hands for the vindicating of the name and cause of God "against these open and professed enemies of it . . . by this . . . negligent toleration and connivance, he involveth himself in the guilt of this sin."[1] It was the inflexible Presbyterian position that the ruler was divinely charged to extirpate error, to repress all dissent from the established ecclesiastical order, and to crush out all heretical and blasphemous opinions which might outrage God and scandalize the elect.[2]

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[1] Calamy, *An indictment against England*, 38.

[2] Clarke, Samuel, *Golden apples. Or seasonable and serious counsel . . . in the resolution of sundry questions, and cases of conscience about divisions, schisms, heresies, and the tolleration of them, etc.* (L., 1659), 49.

[3] *A solemn testimony against toleration and the present proceedings of sectaries and their abettors in England . . . from the commissioners of the general assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, etc.* (Edinburgh, 1649), 7; Cartwright, Christopher, *The magistrates authority in matters of religion, etc.* (L., 1647), 8–10; Bakewell, *An answer*, 42; Bedford, *An examination*, 79–81.

[4] Mayer, John, *Christian liberty vindicated from grosse mistakes, occasioning so great divisions in England, etc.* (L., 1647), 14 *et passim.*

c. On the Question of Religious Toleration

As the full implications of Presbyterian theory became apparent England recoiled in horror. The Parliament which Calvinism sought to make the instrument of its will became increasingly bitter and countered with an Erastian doctrine which entrapped Presbyterianism before the lay character of its ideology became fully apparent. Presbyterian theory would have reduced the civil power to the ignominious role of the executioner of the Church. It could be argued, however, that clerical theory in its discussion of the position of the magistrate in the Church had always spoken in terms of harshness and bigotry in order to revivify the ancient ideal of a union of Church and State, half conscious that the possibility of attaining it had vanished in the modern world. It could be asserted, in other words, that the Presbyterians were devoted to a metaphysical conception which they had small hope of realizing. The pretensions of the Presbyterian theorists concerning the position of the magistrate in the Church were cast in respectable and traditional patterns which need cause no lively apprehension to a revolutionary Parliament which had grasped the reins of ecclesiastical power. It was rather the bigoted, persistent, and almost hysterical denunciation of the slightest degree of religious toleration at a time when political requirements and religious actualities made moderation necessary that fused the forces opposed to and mildly favourable to Presbyterianism into a hardening opposition.

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[1] Brinsley, John, *An antidote against the poysonous weeds of heretical blasphemies, etc.* (L., 1650), 40.

[2] *An apologie for Mr. Iohn Goodwin*, 6 ff.; Bedford, *An examination*, 82; Burgess, Anthony, *The reformation of the church to be endeavoured more than that of the common-wealth, etc.* (L., 1645), 11, 20; Calamy, Edmund, *Sermon before the House of Commons, October, 1644*, in Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, I, 176; Cranford, James, *Hæreseo-machia: or, the mischiefe which heresies doe, and the means to prevent it, etc.* (L., 1646), 49, 50–51; *Humble advice of the Assembly of Divines*, 41; Mayer, *Christian liberty vindicated*, 18; Shepard, Thomas, *Subjection to Christ in all His ordinances and appointments, the best means to preserve our liberty, etc.* (L., 1652), 117; Sedgwick, *The nature and dangers of heresies*, 37–39; *A solemn testimony*, 5; *Στερέωμα: the establishment*, 27, 61, 74, *et passim; A testimony of the ministers . . . of Salop, to the truth of Iesus Christ, and to the solemn league and covenant, etc.* (L., 1648), 4; *The joint-testimonie of the ministers of Devon . . . with their reverend brethren . . . of London, unto the truth of Jesus . . . In pursuance of the solemn league, and covenant, etc.* (L., 1648), 22–23.

The toleration of diversity and of error was declared to be expressly against the laws of God and the very nature of the Christian faith.[1] The Presbyterians expressed grave fear that some men were labouring for the establishment of a toleration of error, "as if men would not sin fast enough except they were biden . . . or as if men were afraid that errour . . . would not grow fast enough except it were made much of."[2] The toleration of error is an open invitation to atheism and will inevitably bring about the dissolution of the Christian Church. We must refuse to countenance even the smallest heresies, lest they grow great and "eat out the very heart and life of all religion at last."[3] The Church has "one eternall unchangeable law" according to which all professions of faith must be squared.[4] Those who refuse to embrace it must be cut down with the sword.[5] England must face this high duty squarely and honestly. The "cursed toleration" for which many men plead will rend the Church, disturb the State, and trample all ordinances and government under foot, bringing "forth many blasphemies and abominations," banishing "religion and righteousnesse quite out of the land, and at last" making it "a hell upon earth."[6]

Presbyterianism saw the hope of a godly establishment in England fading before the disintegrative influences of sectarianism. It concluded correctly that the principle of religious toleration constituted the greatest single obstacle to the erection of the true Church in the realm.[1] The Presbyterian theorists, with fanatical anger, charged that devotion to the anarchistic principle of religious liberty must be regarded as in itself the greatest of all heresies.[2] As the army began to demand the benefits of religious toleration for all Christian communions; as the sects grew in influence and numbers; as large sections of responsible lay opinion became convinced that peace could be established in England only upon the basis of a comprehensive and moderate religious settlement, the Presbyterian denunciation of state toleration reached a shrill crescendo of vituperative protest.[3] The granting of a toleration, it was declared, would be comparable to putting a sword into a mad man's hands. It was a "proclaiming liberty to the wolves to come into Christ's fold to prey upon his lambs; a toleration of soul-murther . . . and for the establishing whereof, damned souls in hel would accurse men on earth."[4]

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[1] Byfield, Richard, *Temple-defilers defiled, wherein a true visible Church of Christ is described, etc.* (L., 1645), 29; *A solemn testimony*, 3.

[2] *The harmonious consent of the ministers of the province within the County Palatine of Lancaster . . . to our solemn league and covenant, etc.* (L., 1648), 10–11.

[3] Allen, Richard, *An antidote against heresy: or, a preservative for Protestants against the poyson of papists, Anabaptists, Arrians, Arminians, etc.* (L., 1648), 144.

[4] *A necessary and seasonable testimony against toleration and the present proceedings of sectaries and their abettors in England in reference to religion and government, etc.* (L., 1649), 3.

[5] *Ibid.*, 4–5.

[6] *Ibid.*, 7.

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[1] Case, Thomas, *Deliverance-obstruction: or, the set-backs of reformation, etc.* (L., 1646), 34–37 *et passim;* Hughes, George, *Vae-euge-tuba. Or, the wo-ioy trumpet, sounding the third and greatest woe to the antichristian world, etc.* (L., 1647), 33–34; Ley, *The new quere*, 28; *To the right honourable . . . Peers and . . . Commons . . . the humble petition of many thousands of the well-affected . . . of the county Palatine of Lancaster* (L., 1646); Shepard, Thomas, *New Englands lamentation for Old Englands present errours, and divisions, etc.* (L., 1644), 3; *Anti-toleration*, 5–8.

[2] Byfield, *Temple-defilers defiled*, 28; Case, Thomas, *A model of true spiritual thankfulnesse, etc.* (L., 1646), 24–25; *The harmonious consent*, 10–11.

[3] *Arguments for toleration published for the satisfaction of all moderate men* (L., 1647), 3, 5; Burgess, Anthony, *Romes cruelty & apostacie, etc.* (L., 1645), 19–20; *Sine qua non . . . With certain arguments against toleration* (L., 1647), no pagin.; [Smith, George], *An alarum: to The last warning peece to London by way of answer: discovering the danger of sectaries suffered: and the necessity of order, and uniformity to bee established* (L., c.1646), 7, 12; *A solemn testimony*, 2, 8–12; Vicars, John, *The schismatick sifted. Or, the picture of Independents, freshly and fairly washt-over again, etc.* (L., 1646), 22; *A letter of the ministers of the city of London . . . To the reverend Assembly of Divines sitting at Westminster . . . against toleration* (L., 1646), 2–3, 4–6; *The harmonious consent*, 11–12.

[4] *The harmonious consent*, 12. For similar sentiments *vide* [Blackwood, Christopher], *Against universall libertie of conscience, etc.* (L., 1644), 1; *’Ασύστατα. The repugnancy and inconsistency of the maintenance of an orthodox ministery, and tolleration of heretical opinions* (L., 1659), 4–5, 6–8; B., A., *A serious admonition to those members of Parliament that sate alone without the secluded members. . . . Together with a vindication of the Presbyterians, etc.* (L., 1660), 7–8, 11.

Its only fruit would be the rending of the Church into an anarchy of lawless sects, the complete decay of the Christian uniformity to which men are enjoined, and the introduction of fatal divisions in the State.[1] If the deadly heresy of toleration is not stamped out quickly by the Church with the full support of the State, "England shall be swallowed up with sects, schismes, divisions . . . and become an odious sink and common receptacle of all the prodigious errours, lies, heresies . . . in the world." After long travail she will have brought into being nothing but "an hideous monster of toleration."[2]

In few periods in history has orthodoxy defended itself by such hysterical and vituperative sentiments. It must be borne in mind that the thought which we have just examined was typical of extreme Presbyterianism in the period under consideration. Many of the pamphlets we have cited were petitions and public manifestoes signed by the ministry which was seeking to impose its will upon England. No fewer than 689 of the Presbyterian clergy signed these public expressions of intolerance in the period under survey. These documents display the same awful fear that Calvinistic orthodoxy exhibited in Holland when Arminianism was sapping the very foundations of the rigidity of its dogma and attacking the austerity of its discipline. We have frequently suggested that all bitter intolerance rests upon fear, that it constitutes the automatic defence mechanism of a dominant party which has seen the dread vision of its own dissolution. In England this fear was translated into a complete denial of compromise and moderation, into an effort which, fortunately, never proceeded beyond the stage of theory, to extirpate spiritual forces that were in total strength more powerful than Presbyterianism itself. Calvinism was driven in its hour of desperation to refurbish the classical doctrine of persecution and to urge it as the solution to the complex spiritual problem which England faced following the overthrow of episcopal government. When England appreciated the implications of this theory religious toleration was embraced as the only guarantee against a wholly hideous internecine strife.

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[1] Thorowgood, Thomas, *Moderation justified, and the Lords being at hand emproved, etc.* (L., 1645), 12; *Vindiciae veritatis; or, an unanimous attestation to Gods blessed truth revealed in His Word, etc.* (L., 1648), 9.

[2] *A testimony to the truth of Jesus Christ . . . as also against the errours, heresies and blasphemies of these times, and the toleration of them, etc.* (L., 1648), 32–33.

d. On the Treatment of Heresy and Error

The minor Presbyterian thinkers were unanimous in their support of the doctrine of religious persecution, though many of them remained vague in their specific recommendations. In general, the traditional arguments were elaborated with slight variations which disclosed the telling impact of the current crisis upon orthodox thought in England. It is noteworthy, however, that Presbyterian theory on the important question of the treatment of heresy and error was not conceived in a vacuum of abstraction; it was carefully designed to fortify the Church in its struggle to attain mastery in England and it named very specifically the sects and opinions which the State should undertake to repress in the interests of orthodoxy.

The true faith, the theorists maintained, cannot brook the presence of heresy and error which mock the Church and blaspheme God's truth. The Church and State must combine to effect a restraint which will drive error from the nation and which will maintain an incessant pressure until heresy does not dare to rear its head.[1] In England this task has devolved upon Parliament, "and God forbid you should be like David's idol, have eyes, and not take notice of these; eares, and not heare the sad cryes of a distracted afflicted people against them; hands, and should not smite and cut off such wicked workers from the city of our God."[2] Men of true faith cannot endure blasphemy. "Religion allowes no scepticisme under pretence of humility, in matters of moment."[3] Reason and persuasion should be employed in an effort to win the damned from their errors. But those who will not be won or who will not be subdued by the weapons of the spirit must be cut down by the magistrate at the direction of the Church.[1] Religious truth and faith, it was admitted, could not be forced, but men should at least be compelled to live quietly and to refrain from giving offence to the Church.[2] "That which the water cannot wash out, the fire will burn out."[3] The State must cause the discipline of the true Church to prevail absolutely and universally. No crannies may be left in the walls of the Church lest they be enlarged in order to admit a flood of error.[4] The Church cannot expect, immediately, to include within its communion only the unspotted, but it can at least strike down those who defy its authority and outrage its truth.[5] For charity does not include the toleration of sin and error. Heresy and false religion must be the objects of our hatred, not of our charity.[1] England must not offend God by failing in the reformation of His Church. The supreme task of the magistrate is the eradication of the heresy which threatens it at the very moment of its foundation. "Shall famous England become an Amsterdam of mixtures, an island of monsters?" one zealous Presbyterian enquired.[2] All those who oppose the purity of reformation must be destroyed. The "seducing prophet must die the death, for offering to thrust God's people from him."[3]

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[1] Reyner, William, *Babylons ruining earthquake and the restauration of Zion, etc.* (L., 1644), 44 ff.; *Anti-toleration*, 19.

[2] Hodges, Thomas, *The growth and spreading of hæresie, etc.* (L. 1647), 11.

[3] Blackwood, *Against universall libertie of conscience*, 5.

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[1] Blackwood, *Against universall libertie of conscience*, 5–7; Bedford, *An examination*, 75; Cranford, *Hæreseo-machia*, 42–46; *The humble petition of the ministers of the counties of Suffolke and Essex, concerning church-government, etc.* (L., 1646), 2; *To the right worshipfull, the alderman, and common counsell-men of the ward of Farrington. . . . A representation of the humble and earnest desires of the inhabitants of the said ward* (L., 1645) (s.sh.); *To the right honourable the lord mayor . . . and commons of the city of London . . . The humble petition of many well-affected free men and covenant ingaged citizens of the city of London* (L., n.d.) (s.sh.); *The humble petition of the lord mayor, aldermen, and commons of the city of London, in common-council assembled: concerning church-government. . . . With the answer thereunto* (L., 1646) (s.sh.); Walker, George, *A sermon preached before the . . . House of Commons, at their late solemne monethly fast, Januarie 29th*, 1644, *etc.* (L., 1645), 18–21.

[2] Clarke, *Golden apples*, 79.

[3] Reyner, *Babylons ruining earthquake*, 20.

[4] Mayer, *Christian liberty vindicated*, 6–7; Palmer, Herbert, *The glasse of Gods providence towards His faithfull ones, etc.* (L., 1644), 54–55, 58; Sedgwick, *The nature and dangers of heresies*, 17–23; Tuckney, Anthony, *The balme of Gilead, for the wounds of England, etc.* (L., 1643), 12–13; Spurstowe, William, *Englands eminent judgments, caus'd by the abuse of Gods eminent mercies, etc.* (L., 1644), 27–28; Johnson, Robert, *Lux & lex, or the light and the law of Jacobs house, etc.* (L., 1647), 28; Seaman, Lazarus, *The head of the church, the judge of the world, etc.* (L., 1647), 27, 29; Wilson, Thomas, *Davids zeale for Zion* (L., 1641), 6–7, 28; Case, Thomas, *Spirituall whoredome discovered, etc.* (L., 1647), 13, 25–26; Newcomen, Matthew, *A sermon, tending to set forth the right use of the disasters that befall our armies, etc.* (L., 1644), 36–37; Sedgwick, Obadiah, *An arke against a deluge. Or safety in dangerous times, etc.* (L., 1644), 26, 29–30; White, John, *The troubles of Jerusalems restauration, or the churches reformation, etc.* (L., 1646), 57–58 (mispaged).

[5] *Humble advice of the Assembly of Divines*, 36; Newcomen, Matthew, *The duty of such as would walk worthy of the Gospel; to endeavour union, not division nor toleration, etc.* (L., 1646), 16–19; *A testimony to the truth of Jesus Christ*, 31–33.

These severe courses, the Presbyterian apologists contended, cannot be legitimately represented as tyrannous. For they are undertaken by a Church clothed with the power and certainty which arise from the infallibility of its truth. Therefore it undertakes in behalf of absolute truth nothing less than the reduction of absolute error. The punishment of heresy is not designed to compel men to violate their consciences but to force them to hear the truth and to restrain them from the awful sin of opposing it.[4] The Church can at least oblige men to embrace the sole means by which faith may be attained.[5] "The way . . . to free the man from sinne, is to instruct him; and if he be froward and will not receive instruction, then to persuade him by some punishment, to be so humble and wise, as to hearken."[6] No sane man can maintain that religious authority persecutes when it compels men to lend obedience to the fundamentals of truth.[7]

The Presbyterian extremists in their avid search for a rationalization with which to buttress the system of persecution which they demanded had all but done violence to one of the basic teachings of Calvinism. Calvinism had been restrained by the very rigour and logic of the doctrine of predestination from embracing religious persecution as a positive moral end. No effort of man is competent to affect the inscrutable will of God in preserving some men to election and in abandoning other men to damnation. If the damned cannot be saved by human efforts, neither can the elect be perverted by the heresy and error which surround them. God's truth is preserved amongst His elect despite the error which assails it. Thus Calvinism could advance no impressive case for persecution. Its rigid intolerance rested essentially upon the instinctive horror which gripped a mind that conceived itself to be immediately and infallibly led by God when the majesty of God was blasphemed and when the ineffable glory of His Church was desecrated. The Calvinist persecuted rather to avenge God than to preserve himself from the infection of heresy.

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[1] Cheynell, Francis, *Sions memento, and Gods alarum, etc.* (L., 1643), 11.

[2] Hodges, *The growth and spreading of hæresie*, 46.

[3] *Ibid.*, 57.

[4] Blackwood, *Against universall libertie of conscience*, 3; Clarke, *Golden apples*, 79–81.

[5] Blackwood, *Against universall libertie of conscience*, 3.

[6] *Ibid.*, 4.

[7] *Ibid.*, 7–8.

But the unprecedented spread of sectarianism in England had in some measure shaken the amazing confidence of the Calvinists in the power of truth and in the certainty of election.[1] The Church, they held, was being laid in ruins by the rising tide of sectarian error. Even the tyranny of the bishops was declared preferable to the anarchy which existed in England.[2] Errors had sprung up on every side, many of which assailed the very foundations of faith.[3] The unity and the very existence of God's Church had been threatened and it had no other recourse than to demand the assistance of the civil arm in cutting off the cancerous growth which threatened to rend the garment of Christ.

The intolerance of Presbyterian thought is almost unbelievable when we recall the strength of sectarianism in England during the Interregnum and the great power of the diverse groups which had united upon the principle of religious toleration. None the less, Presbyterianism proceeded with reckless disregard of reality to demand an exclusive church structure which would permit of no dissent, and to require legal power to punish as erroneous beliefs held by the vast majority of the Englishmen of that day.

The death penalty was seriously urged by representative Presbyterian apologists for errors which, as defined by the Presbyterians, would have included substantial portions of the nation. We have previously commented upon the insistence of the Presbyterian leadership for effective legislation designed to curb blasphemy by the death penalty.[1] This demand was widely expressed in the Presbyterian pamphlets of the age. "The most capitall offender can but be put to death,"[2] and in this way England may expiate her former sins.[3] The Word of God plainly prescribes the death penalty for blasphemy,[4] and the civil ruler must answer to God for failure to carry out this injunction.[5] For he who "pulls down the foundation of all humane society; who takes away religion, or abolishes it out of the minds of men . . . is to be punished with the greatest and most grievous punishments."[6] In like manner, idolatry, a term which the Presbyterians employed in condemning Roman Catholicism and, not infrequently, Arminianism, must be exterminated by the civil State by means of the death penalty.[7] Idolatry is an act wilfully perpetrated in violation of the laws of nature, and since it is a formal action there can be no doubt when the offence has been committed.[8] Complete anarchy would prevail if men were left free to perform all those sinful actions for which they could allege conscience.[9] This spiritual anarchy which the Christian State must guard against with the weapons of the death penalty, other Presbyterian extremists contended, included also the offences of "heresy" and "error."[10]

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[1] Thus the author of *Anti-toleration* (1646) argued with complete pessimism that the view that truth will in the end prevail against error has but little basis in reality. For most blasphemous opinions are rooted in faith and not in reason. The godly man and the heretic simply do not speak the same language. You cannot quote the Bible to a man who denies the truth of the Bible. Hence Christians enjoy no common ground with heretics (pp. 21–22). The only recourse for the preservation of true faith is the extirpation of heresy.

[2] Mayer, *Christian liberty vindicated*, 14.

[3] Cranford, *Hæreseo-machia*, 36; Palmer, *The glasse of Gods providence*, 55 ff.

The Presbyterian thinkers defined with precision the limits of the true Church which, they held, could not permit the slightest traces of dissent. They were therefore frank in the denunciation of all religious groups that did not share their ideal of a Calvinistic State Church. In common with all of the major communions of the period they demanded the complete suppression of the eccentric and the violent sectarian groups which so gravely disrupted the English religious scene during this era.[1] But Presbyterian theory extended farther to the denial of any toleration or connivance for substantial and firmly rooted groups, at least two of which exceeded the Presbyterians in strength and following throughout the period under survey. The Presbyterians would have excluded Independency, the Baptists, Anglicanism, and Roman Catholicism from any share in the spiritual life of England. For a minority religious sect violently and persistently to demand the extermination of more powerful groups, though it bespeaks bravery and a rigid devotion to its conception of the Church, is, to say the least, suicidal. For such a policy inevitably results in the fusion of the elements which have been denounced into a sturdy opposition based upon the acceptance of the principle of religious toleration. The strength of Cromwell's Government was principally derived from the fact that he stood between England and the threat of Presbyterian bigotry.

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[1] *Vide ante*, 90–93, 111 ff.

[2] Reyner, *Babylons ruining earthquake*, 45–46.

[3] *Ibid.*, 48.

[4] Brinsley, *An antidote*, 41; Cotton, John, *An abstract of laws and government, etc.* (L., 1641, *1655*), 18; *An apologie for Mr. Iohn Goodwin*, 8; Newcomen, *The duty of such as would walk worthy of the Gospel*, 16; Mayer, *Christian liberty vindicated*, 18–20.

[5] Brinsley, *An antidote*, 42.

[6] *An apologie for Mr. Iohn Goodwin*, 7.

[7] *Ibid.*, 6–7; Cotton, *An abstract of laws and government*, 18–19; *The examiner examined. Certaine questions proposed to the author of Zeale Examined concerning his principles, etc.* (L., 1652), 6–7; Hodges, *The growth and spreading of hæresie*, 57; Mayer, *Christian liberty vindicated*, 21; Reyner, *Babylons ruining earthquake*, 46–48.

[8] Idolatry "may . . . be convicted by outward actions, professions and confessions." (*The examiner examined*, 7.)

[9] Mayer, *Christian liberty vindicated*, 20.

[10] *An apologie for Mr. Iohn Goodwin*, 6–7; Cotton, *An abstract of laws and government*, 19–20. Cotton held that heresy "if it be joyned with indeavour to seduce others thereunto" deserved the death penalty.

The Independents were branded in frantic remonstrations as carnal and schismatic men. They have been wilful in their separation, and their churches rest upon false foundations.[2] They have masked errors under their defence of the heinous principle of liberty of conscience.[3] Indeed, their advocacy of this doctrine marks them most clearly as heretical and as enemies of the true faith. They have been guilty of urging a solution for the religious problem which is "the mother of contention, the root of schism, the back-door to heresie, the nullity of church-government," and the ruin of Christ's discipline.[4] They have endeavoured to procure the disintegration of the Church and the overthrow of the Christian conscience.[1] As enemies of the Church and of truth they must be suppressed with the assistance of the Christian magistrate.[2]

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[1] Documentation is hardly necessary on this point. *Vide* almost any extremist Presbyterian pamphlet of the period 1643–1648.

[2] G., I., (i.e. Graunt, John), *Truths victory against heresie, etc.* (L., 1645), 26–27.

[3] *Ibid.*, 27–29.

[4] *A true copy of a letter from divers ministers about Colchester in the county of Essex, to the Assembly of Divines, against a toleration* (L., 1646) (s.sh.).

The Presbyterian apologists were even more bitter in their denunciation of the Baptists, who were normally regarded as heretical by the Puritan extremists. The sect, it was charged, had advanced the most damnable errors under the licence of religious freedom. They were held to be weeds in the garden of the Church which were choking out God's own planting. The Baptists stood convicted of gross error on many points.[3] They have been foremost in advancing the doctrine of toleration, which "is most sinful, destructive, both to truth and godliness, and is in its own nature the mother of confusion. . . ."[4] The *Essex Watchmen's Watchword* (1649) held them to be largely responsible for the religious clauses of the *Agreement of the People* and for rallying popular support to the principles of toleration. They have defended the liberty of men to forsake Christ for unbelief and paganism. They demand a liberty to insult God and to blaspheme Christ and the Holy Spirit,[5] while another Presbyterian writer alleged that they were rapidly degenerating into popery. They complain of persecution and compulsion. "But what fault is there in that [they are] forced, so long as 'tis just? If the parliament force them to be just, and honest, and sober, and peaceable, are these things evil because they are forced to it?"[6] The Baptist heresies are a blemish upon the spotless garment of Christ's Church which must be eradicated before the reformation of England can be complete.[1]

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[1] Walker, Clement, *The compleat history of Independency* (L., 1660–1661), iii, 22; *The harmonious consent*, 7 ff.; Vicars, *The schismatick sifted*, 3.

[2] *A catalogue of the several sects and opinions in England . . . with a briefe rehearsall of their false and dangerous tenents* (L., 1647) (s.sh.); Graunt, *Truths victory against heresie*, 26–29; *The harmonious consent*, 7 ff.; *Humble Petition of many thousands of the well-affected . . . of the county Palatine of Lancaster* (L., 1646); *A testimony of the ministers . . . of Stafford*, 6; *A true copy of a letter from . . . Colchester*, s.sh.; Vicars, *The schismatick sifted*, 3–5; *Vindiciae veritatis*, 9; *Petition of the city of London* (May 26, 1646), in Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, I, 184.

[3] Graunt, *Truths victory against heresie*, 19–26.

[4] *A testimony of the ministers . . . of Stafford*, 5.

[5] *The Essex Watchmen's Watchword, etc.* (L., 1649), 7–9.

[6] *An animadversion upon the late Lord Protectors declaration, for the distressed churches of Lesna, &c. Together with a seasonable caution against the petition of the Kentish Anabaptists, for too large a toleration in religion, etc.* (L., 1659), 5.

The extirpation of Anglicanism and Romanism had been specifically undertaken in the Covenant, and Presbyterian theory accordingly assumed that Puritan England was in full accord in the pursuit of this end. Anglicanism and Arminianism were regarded by the theorists as synonymous, while the Laudian teachings were held to be a fundamental error particularly in so far as they called into question the doctrine of election. The implacable hatred for prelacy which had been inculcated in extreme Puritan thought by the Laudian repression bore evil fruit during the period of the Civil Wars. The only conservative compromise possible in the religious issue raised by that complex conflict was a comprehensive agreement between moderate Anglicanism and Puritanism, which had now assumed the garb of Presbyterianism. We have noticed that on numerous occasions conversations were undertaken towards that end. But the exclusive pretensions of Presbyterian theory, mutual mistrust, and the deep-seated Puritan conviction that the Church had under Laud's tuition shifted from its foundations of Protestantism, had done their deadly work. It was the normal Presbyterian view that prelacy and popery, which had become inextricably associated in the Puritan mind, must be eradicated from England.[2]

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[1] *A catalogue of the several sects and opinions in England*, s.sh.; *The harmonious consent*, 7 ff.; *Humble Petition of many thousands of the well-affected . . . of the county Palatine of Lancaster; A testimony of the ministers . . . of Stafford*, 4–5. The *Joint-testimonie of the ministers of Devon* (1648), which was signed by seventy-three ministers of the county, was more conciliatory. The manifesto demanded the erection of a thorough Presbyterian discipline and denounced the doctrine of religious liberty. It regarded the errors of the Baptists as dangerous but not as fundamental heresies. The ministers therefore held that the sectaries should be won by reason and persuasion.

[2] *A catalogue of the several sects and opinions in England*, s.sh.; *The Essex Watchmen's Watchword*, 8–9; Graunt, *Truths victory against heresie*, 7–15; *The harmonious consent*, 7; Mayer, *Christian liberty vindicated*, 7, 21; *To the right worshipfull, the alderman, and common counsell-men of the ward of Farrington. . . . A representation of the humble and earnest desires of the inhabitants of the said ward*, s.sh.; *A testimony of the ministers . . . of Stafford*, 4–5; Newcomen, *The duty of such as would walk worthy of the Gospel*, 16–17; Reyner, *Babylons ruining earthquake*, 45–46, 48, *et passim.*

8. Summary

England owes much to Puritanism. Its revolt against Arminianism checked for two centuries the drift of the Church towards Rome and destroyed permanently the tendency to define that Church in narrow limits which belied the Erastian and comprehensive nature of its origins. Puritanism vindicated the dignity of the human conscience, and its sturdy individualism was not unconnected with the vast implementation of constitutional liberties which was to be the fruit of the five decades of political strife beginning in 1640. England was swept with a religious revival which altered fundamentally the morality and the ideals of modern England. But such contribution as it made to the development of religious toleration was indirect and negative. The dogmatism of Puritanism was inflexible. "The Church, according to them, was absolutely authoritative over religious opinion no less than religious practice. It could tolerate no differences of creed. The distinction of fundamental and non-fundamental articles of belief, elaborately maintained by Chillingworth and Taylor, was held to be dangerous heresy; and the principle of latitude, with all the essential ideas of free thought which have sprung out of it, was esteemed un-unchristian."[1]

Presbyterianism offered no other solution for the problem of sectarianism than the extirpation of those who differed from the precepts of Geneva. England had risen in rebellion in no small degree because of the manifest indignity and the ruinous consequences flowing from such a philosophy. The nation was shocked and repelled when Puritanism could provide no more reasonable and charitable scheme of religious life. The Presbyterians proposed an essentially medieval ideal which the violence of a century of reformation and an ever-enlarging diversity had destroyed. The abortive effort of Presbyterian bigotry to attain mastery in England had two profoundly important consequences in the religious life of the nation. The sects and Anglicanism were driven to embrace the principle of religious toleration upon both spiritual and pragmatic grounds in order to thwart the menace of a new orthodoxy. Ecclesiastical radicalism was forced into an alliance with the anti-clericalism which had come to dominate the lay mind in order to deal a crushing and irrevocable blow to the ancient ideal of a religious uniformity gained and maintained by coercive means. The lesson of these years was to be forged into a permanent principle in English politics and thought. A further consequence of the determination of the Presbyterian leaders to set up a godly kingdom in England was a violent and far-reaching reaction against clericalism in particular and institutional religion in general. The English laity had been deeply disturbed and driven to the threshold of revolt by the Laudian tyranny. Presbyterianism offered no more than the exchange of one species of clerical bigotry for another infinitely worse because it enjoyed the support of a larger element of English thought and was implemented by the power of determined arms. Rationalism, agnosticism, and, what is even more fatal to the theological preoccupation, sheer indifference were to be the fruits, through a full century, of the attempt to revive an outworn, though noble, ideal in a modern State.

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[1] Tulloch, John, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century* (London and Edinburgh, 1872), II, 4.

It was evident by 1649 that extreme Presbyterianism had failed in its efforts to impose upon England an exclusive church structure. Its leaders had been wholly unable and unwilling to bend their theory to the requirements of circumstance. The harsh bigotry which they proposed to fasten upon England had raised formidable forces under the leadership of Independency which had offered overwhelming resistance to the Presbyterian ideal. Sectarianism was to dominate the religious life of England in the decade following the death of the king quite as fully as had Presbyterianism in the decade of rebellion. Presbyterianism stood in 1649 discredited by its intimate connection with the Scots, and destitute of able leadership through the ravages which death, infirmity, and discouragement had made in the ranks of its thinkers. It had been stunned by the execution of the king, disheartened by the precipitous triumph of sectarianism in religion and of radicalism in politics. In so many ways a child of the sixteenth century in its political and philosophical ideology, Presbyterianism could not venture into the uncharted seas of constitutional experimentation and religious toleration. Extreme Presbyterianism could offer no programme in 1649 calculated to win the support of any substantial element of English public opinion. The leadership passed to moderate and younger men who endeavoured to retrieve as many gains as possible for the Church of God by concessions to reality and by enlargement of the limits of Christian comprehension.

C. Moderate Presbyterian Thought and the Development of Religious Toleration

We have previously observed that a profoundly important shift in the temper of Presbyterian thought occurred after the execution of the king and the triumph of sectarianism. Irreconcilable Presbyterian theory offered no solution to the dilemma thus created save a blind and stubborn insistence upon the erection of an Establishment which dominant opinion would not tolerate. During the decade of the Commonwealth and Protectorate orthodox Presbyterian theory became desiccated and sterile. A younger generation of moderate Presbyterians arose which attempted to orient Calvinism to the realities of the situation and to seek some Establishment which would preserve orthodox doctrine by substantial concessions on the questions of church government and discipline. These men were prepared to recognize the existence of Independency and sought to find some formula of accommodation or unity which would retain the core of Calvinistic dogma while minimizing the importance of the points which for a decade had been in most violent dispute. They were disposed to blame the older Presbyterian leaders for the disaster which had overcome God's Church in England. Bitterness, extremism, bigotry, and inordinate power must be renounced and the basis of Calvinistic Protestantism must be extended to its nethermost limits.

Moderate Presbyterian theory proposed, in essence, that the National Establishment should be broadened to constitute a fusion of Presbyterianism and Congregationalism. The "respectability" of Independency was recognized and important concessions were made in order to gain the powerful support of the party. Independency was to clear itself of the charges of sectarianism and schism by engaging with a chastened Presbyterianism in the establishment and maintenance of a National Church which would include those elements which before 1640 had been loosely denominated Puritan. No toleration of error and dissent was to be permitted outside the confines of this Church, though the moderate Presbyterians were by no means as harsh as their predecessors in the penalties which they proposed to rear in order to protect the purity of faith. Presbyterian thought had, in short, so far undergone moderation as to be practically identical with Independent theory as elaborated during the early months of the Westminster Assembly. The distinction between a moderate Presbyterian and a conservative Independent was, indeed—as Cromwell was to discover—barely perceptible. The moderate Presbyterians deliberately announced that their policy on the controversial problem of the toleration of heresy and error lay in the broad area between the position of their more rigorous colleagues and the anarchistic tenets of the sects.

Moderate Presbyterian thought had, in brief, assumed a position of great strength which it was to exploit fully. It represented a principle of order which appealed to sober and responsible men, harassed by the steady deterioration of Protestantism into extreme and bickering sects. It proposed a fusion of the two great streams of Puritan thought whose divergence had caused such incalculable damage in the period of the Civil Wars. It appealed particularly to responsible elements of lay opinion that were desperately seeking to coalesce on some orderly, systematic, and disciplined National Establishment which would do a minimum of violence to traditional religious conceptions. It has already been observed that the point of view presented by this school of thought enjoyed the majority support of Parliament during the Protectorate. Had it not been for Cromwell's stubborn and implacable devotion to the principle of religious toleration it seems possible that the programme of this party would have prevailed. That it did not do so is of the very greatest significance for the development of religious toleration. For, although moderate

Presbyterian thought represented a material enlargement and softening of orthodox theory, it offered England neither the comprehensive and moderate religious conception of historical Anglicanism nor the genuine devotion to religious liberty which lay at the very roots of sectarian thought. The suspicion could not be downed that the limited toleration which moderate Presbyterianism was prepared to extend was tarred with the brush of expediency.

1. ON THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN MAGISTRATE

The views of the moderate Presbyterians on the important question of the power of the ruler in the Church display a remarkable liberalization when they are compared with the inflexible opinions of their extremist colleagues. It will be noticed, too, that moderate thought on this question grew consistently more liberal following the triumph of sectarianism in 1649.

Stephen Marshall,[1] writing in 1644, complained that Roger

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[1] Marshall (1594?–1655) was one of the illustrious group of Puritans educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, during the early Stuart period. After his graduation in 1618 he was presented with a living in Essex by a patron. His Puritanism soon attracted the attention of his ecclesiastical superiors but no definite charges could be sustained against him. In 1633 Laud's vicar-general described him as "a dangerous man and exceeding cunning. No man doubteth but that he hath an inconformable heart, but externally he observeth all." Marshall was a leader of the Puritan party in his locality and assisted in the campaign which returned a Puritan majority to the Short Parliament. He was at first inclined to support reform of the Church of England but by 1642 had become convinced of the necessity for more drastic reformation. At about this time he embraced Presbyterianism and was appointed a member of the Assembly. He was appointed to several important committees by that body and soon established a reputation as the foremost preacher in England. He played an important part in the formulation of the Assembly's plans for a Presbyterian government and frequently urged its acceptance by Parliament, in which he enjoyed a considerable following. (Fuller, Thomas, *The History of the Worthies of England* (L., 1840), II, 105.) He was never an extreme Presbyterian, however, and steadily sought to find some basis of compromise with Independency. Fuller's charge that "he was so supple a soul, that he brake not a joint, yea, sprained not a sinew, in all the alteration of times" fails to recognize the fairly consistent moderation of the great Presbyterian's thought. Marshall was one of the committee appointed in 1653 to draw up the fundamentals of faith, and Baxter testified to his conciliatory temper in that body. He never wavered in his devotion to Presbyterianism but was willing to make substantial concessions in the interests of Calvinistic unity.

Williams and the sects had invalidated the Old Testament by withdrawing from the ruler his unquestioned duty to assist the Church by the suppression of heresy and error.[1] He held that this teaching, if logically extended, would destroy the discipline of the Church and reduce the State to a purely temporal concern for the welfare of its members. The ruler is properly the "nursing father" to the Church, who is obligated "not to suffer her authority and censures to be despised and set at nought."[2] The State has a direct interest in the maintenance of ecclesiastical order since religious unrest blends easily into civil disturbance. None the less, another moderate observed, it is difficult to determine precisely how the authority of the civil ruler is to be exercised in the interests of the faith without doing violence to religious liberty.[3] Many of the Presbyterian liberals displayed considerable hesitation in conferring substantial religious power upon the magistrate.

The Erastian interests of the State in the maintenance of uniformity received further elaboration from Nathaniel Hardy,[4] writing three years later. The ruler, who has been entrusted with the care of religion and with the assistance of the clergy, should ordain that faith which is most consonant with biblical prescription. From this national Church no dissent can be permitted. "It is true, mens consciences cannot be compelled to embrace the faith professed, no more can their hearts, to the love of morall vertues: yet in regard of outward conformity, they may and ought to be enjoyned the frequenting of Gods publike worship and ordinances."[5] The magistrate must protect the publicly proclaimed faith from the virus of heresy. For what can be "more perillous for the people, then to have liberty, or rather a licentiousnesse of transgressing religions bound, to the eternall hazard of their souls?"[1] The destructive effect of the withdrawal of the support of the magistrate has been all too evident in England in both Church and State.[2] The walls of discipline must be laid and maintained by the strong hand of the ruler if God's interest is to prosper in the realm.

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[1] [Marshall, Stephen], *A late dialogue betwixt a civilian and a divine, concerning the present condition of the Church of England, etc.* (L., 1644), 33–34.

[2] *Ibid.*, 36.

[3] *Thirty and two extremes of these times, discovered and reduced to sixteeen golden meanes, etc.* (L., 1647) (s.sh.).

[4] Nathaniel Hardy (1618–1670) was a native of London. He was educated at Oxford where he was graduated in 1635. He became a well-known preacher in London and during the early days of the Civil War embraced Presbyterianism. (Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, III, 896.) Hardy fell under the influence of the gentle Hammond as early as 1645 and his views display an increasing moderation thereafter. It was not until about 1651 that he passed into moderate Anglicanism, though he continued to preach under Cromwell without molestation despite his efforts to relieve the plight of the deprived clergy. He was held in high favour by the Court after the Restoration.

[5] Hardy, Nathaniel, *The arraignment of licentious liberty, and oppressing tyranny, etc.* (L., 1647), 9.

The moderate Presbyterian theorists spoke with suspicious lack of precision concerning the lengths to which the magistrate should go in the persecution of error. They were rather more interested in urging the view that unity is the infallible hallmark of the truly catholic Church and that this ideal can be attained only with the assistance of the civil arm. Two pamphlets, separated by a decade, argued this view with great temperateness. Nothing, it was submitted, can wreak greater harm to the Church than schism and division. England must seek by all the agencies at her command to found a Church which will be established on the firm rock of God's truth, bearing "with such whose consciences cannot in all things conforme to the publicke rule, so farre as the Word of God would have them borne withall."[3] All good Christians will seek to find unity and peace in that Church, cleaving to the fundamental truths upon which it is established.[4] This Church should be posited in the broad and moderate area which lies between the extremes of a tyrannous forcing of conscience and heresy.[5] It will be girded by the assistance of the civil ruler in implementing the propagation of its truth.[6] The magistrate will likewise support it by the due restraint of heresy and error. This end the pamphleteer would apparently accomplish by a kind of political and social excommunication which would enforce the spiritual penalties of the Church.[7]

The moderate position on the vital question of the role of the

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[1] Hardy, Nathaniel, *The arraignment of licentious liberty, and oppressing tyranny, etc.* (L., 1647), 10.

[2] *Ibid.*, 12–17.

[3] *Certaine considerations to dis-suade men from further gathering of churches in this present juncture of time, etc.* (L., 1643), 3.

[4] *Ibid.*, 4.

[5] Lyford, William, *The matching of the magistrates authority, and the Christians true liberty in matters of religion, etc.* (L., 1654), 1.

[6] *Ibid.*, 6.

[7] *Ibid.*, 6–7.

Christian magistrate in the Church, while soundly Calvinistic, was expressed in moderate overtones which made it stand in the sharpest contrast to orthodox theory. The Christian ruler must labour with the Church towards the unity which we are commanded to attain. But the emphasis of the moderate argument was upon unity rather than upon the penalties which should be employed against those who should wilfully break this unity of faith. The liberalism of the moderate Presbyterian position, therefore, may be said to reside in the conception of the Church which was carefully advanced to heal the fissure in English Calvinism.

2. THE MODERATE IDEAL OF UNIFORMITY

The moderate theorists surveyed with more equanimity than their sterner brethren the spectacle of sectarian dissolution in England. In all periods when the Church has reformed herself she has been beset by error and heresy. The situation in England is only natural after a period of war and disorder, and, in any case, considerable variations in judgment are bound to exist amongst men.[1] Yet this problem cannot be ignored, since the true Church will strive for uniformity of worship and unity of spirit. But that unity must be attained by means which are pleasing to Christ and feasible in fact. The true Church will establish its discipline and bounds at some point between the severity of the papists and the laxity of the sects.[2] The true moderate holds that the civil ruler has an obligation to repress error and schism, with careful regard to the nature and extent of the error involved.[1]

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[1] [Gillespie, George], *Wholesome severity reconciled with Christian liberty. Or, the true resolution of a present controversie concerning liberty of conscience . . . the chiefe arguments and exceptions used in the Bloudy tenent, the Compassionate Samaritane, M.S. to A.S. &c. examined. . . . And in conclusion a parænetick to the five apologists for choosing accomodation rather than toleration* (L., 1645), Intro.; [Marshall, Stephen], *An expedient to preserve peace and amity, among dissenting brethren* (L., 1647), 2–3. George Gillespie (1613–1648) was born in Scotland, the son of a clergyman. After graduating from Saint Andrews he was ordained according to Presbyterian rites and speedily became a leader in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. In 1643 he was named one of the Scottish commissioners to the Westminster Assembly. He left England in 1647 and died at an early age in the following year. Though one of the youngest members of the Assembly he exercised a very great influence upon its deliberations. His writings are temperate, reasoned, and conciliatory. Had he lived he might well have assumed the leadership of the moderate Presbyterian party.

[2] [Gillespie], *Wholesome severity reconciled with Christian liberty*, 2–3.

The most significant divergence of liberal theory from extreme Presbyterianism lay in the admission that the Church was, in a sense at least, a creation left undefined by Christ, whose limits must be broadly conceived lest harshness and persecution blight its treatment of dissent. The Church, Gillespie admitted, cannot claim an infallibility in judging between heresy and truth, though this should not entrap it into promoting a toleration effecting "not only [the] shaking but [the] overturning truth, and peace, and religion, and ordinances, and Church, and soules, and all."[2] The Church, then, must not base its claim to uniformity nor found its discipline upon the pretensions of infallibility of judgment. No man can judge precisely between truth and error. And even if a correct judgment were possible, Christ has reserved to Himself jurisdiction in this momentous matter. The Church must be restrained in its zeal by the reflection that the Apostles have informed it that there will always be heresies and that it is vain to seek their extermination.[3]

The Church, the moderate Presbyterians maintained, must be formed with due respect for the realities which it faces. Indeed, Marshall was prepared to admit the Elizabethan hypothesis that Christ framed the pattern of no Church, ordained no discipline, and established no infallible guiding principles for the administration of His followers. The Church received its institutional character as the world embraced Christianity and as the Church attained maturity. It is therefore the task of the Christian ruler to frame a Church and a discipline which will be consonant with the Word of God, which embraces those who profess the true faith, and which will preserve unity of faith against the tendency of the Church to be dissolved into individual atoms.[1] The ideal of unity is noble and deserves the best efforts of England. But it cannot be gained by the lash of persecution, for the Law of Christ is clearly conceived in meekness, "not striving, but gently waiting."[2] We are only repeating the mistake of the papists when we endeavour to compel men to a formal unity by tyrannous means.[3]

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[1] [Gillespie], *Wholesome severity reconciled with Christian liberty*, 3.

[2] *Ibid.*, 22.

[3] Whitfield, Thomas, *A discourse of liberty of conscience, wherin the arguments of both sides are so equally laid together . . . that the indifferent reader may without difficulty judge, etc.* (L., 1649), 3–4. Thomas Whitfield was a graduate of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He was born in Suffolk and proceeded B.A. from the university in 1609. He was ordained in the next year and from 1613 to 1642 was a minister in Northamptonshire. In 1642 he took sequestered livings at Bugbrook and Great Yarmouth.

Christian unity will be attained in a Presbyterianism which bases itself upon the firm foundations that lie between the morasses of popish tyranny and sectarian licence. It should be founded upon the principle of liberty of conscience, while avoiding carefully licence of the flesh.[4] It should claim nothing more than absolute devotion to the Bible as the standard of its faith and government.[5] It should entrench itself between the two fatal extremes as a "remnant of sad lookers on, which have mourned in secret, suffered with patience, prayed for peace, and preached it . . . while those other two, one by separating, the other by persecuting, and both by froward disputing, have screwed up their differences to an intolerable irreconcileable height."[6] The Church should raise its standard as the refuge of charitable and moderate men who eschew both persecution and licence. Too many men have quarrelled violently over matters of small moment.[7] This is not to say that the Church will exist as a meaningless compromise. Its truth is infallible and exclusive, and it cannot compromise with error.[8] It will require every man to give an account of his peculiarity. The weight of its learning, the strength of its ministry, and the force of its truth will seek to persuade men to walk in harmony with the Church of Christ.[1] If the Church would utilize the insuperable weapons which lie at its disposal, avoiding the arms of persecution, the dangerous doctrine of toleration would speedily disappear. For such a Church would not fail in charity and gentleness, even towards the most misguided men.[2]

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[1] [Marshall], *An expedient to preserve peace and amity*, 6 ff.

[2] *The moderate Presbyterian. Or certaine propositions and considerations humbly offered to the view of the godly, wise, and moderate, both of the Presbyterian and Independent party* (L., 1645), 5.

[3] *Ibid.*, 6.

[4] *Thirty and two extremes of these times*, s.sh.

[5] *Complaints concerning corruptions and grievance in church-government, etc.* (L., 1660), 4.

[6] *Ibid.*, 2.

[7] Manton, Thomas, *Meate out of the eater, or, hopes of unity in and by divided and distracted times, etc.* (L., 1647), 48.

[8] *Ibid.*, 49–50.

The moderate Presbyterians were prepared to disavow the rigidity of their more extreme co-religionists—a rigidity which had resulted in a widespread revulsion of public opinion against Presbyterianism and which had enormously strengthened the sectarian thesis that toleration alone offered a peaceful and permanent solution to the religious crisis in England. They had made very large concessions in their quest for unity with Independency. They had repudiated the *jure divino* pretensions of the fanatics and had defined the Church and its discipline in terms strangely reminiscent of Elizabethan Anglicanism. They had displayed great tolerance and patience in considering the problem of heresy and had made it clear that they would lend their support to no systematic effort to eradicate error by violent means. They had lent rather fine support to the thesis, which has contributed so largely to the development of religious toleration, that the Church must place its ultimate reliance in the eternal struggle with the hosts of error in the spiritual weapons with which it has been endowed. Marshall, writing in 1647, sought to assure England that the harsh bigotry of extremism had been repudiated. The moderate Presbyterians desired the support of the State, but not in order to exploit its strength for persecuting ends. They did not subscribe to the views of the extremists who "seem to bee so greedy of this absolute power over the actions and consciences of men, that rather then want it, they will derive their right from Jesus Christ, making it *jure divino* to be in themselves."[3] This intolerant position afforded no gain for England over the tyranny and persecuting zeal of the bishops from which the land has been so recently delivered.

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[1] Firmin, Giles, *Separation examined: or, a treatise wherein the grounds for separation from the ministry and churches of England are weighed, and found too light, etc.* (L., 1652), 88–89.

[2] *Ibid.*, 90.

[3] [Marshall], *An expedient to preserve peace and amity*, 11.

3. ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE INDEPENDENTS: THE ACCEPTANCE OF REALITY

Moderate Presbyterian theory sought to coalesce the scattered elements of English Puritanism within a broadly conceived Calvinistic framework comprehensive enough to include those fragments that had not slipped into outright sectarianism. They were, in short, willing to grant in 1649 the demands which Independency had made just six years previously. The Presbyterian liberals sought to emphazise the fundamental unity which they enjoyed with Independency, and by timely concessions to overcome the differences which separated them.

Presbyterianism and Independency, it was urged, had laboured together for the overthrow of tyranny and the completion of God's reformation in England. Futile divisions have developed between them which destroy the unity of the Church and encourage the growth of error and popery.[1] Yet the matters which divide both groups are such "as doth at most but ruffle a little the fringe, not any way rend the garment of Christ."[2] The differences in opinion should be regarded as healthful and should stimulate men in their search for truth, rather than being conceived as breaking the unity of the Church. Men have elevated trifling matters into fundamentals of faith and have been imperious in seeking to exalt their own opinions. Some men have seized upon these minor disagreements in order to demand a toleration, having despaired of finding unity again.[3] Others, the London provincial assembly was moved to admit in 1649, have been over-rigid in urging uniformity in circumstantial things, and imitate the "cruelty of that giant who laid upon a bed all he took, and those who were too long he cut them even with his bed, and such as were too short he stretched out to the length of it. God hath not made all men of a length nor height."[1] The way of unity and truth will be found to lie between the violence of extremism and that legal protection of error which breeds schism and sects. We should be more ready to "goe two miles in an accommodation, (yea as many as the Word of God will suffer me) then one mile in a toleration."[2] We must first seek unity before surrendering to the despondency of a toleration. We must search the Bible for the will of Christ and yearn for that unity which He has commanded, charitably ignoring the inconsequential differences which divide us. Presbyterianism must be prepared to join with all Christians in a mutual toleration of all that does no violence to the fundamentals of Christian faith.[3] England, in other words, has embraced the doctrine of religious toleration before it has exhausted the resources of accommodation. This unity of faith may be attained without the slightest coercion of conscience, which, indeed, is subject only to the will of God as revealed in His Word.[4] Christian unity may be gained by the establishment of a moderately Presbyterian Church which enjoys the support and protection of the civil magistrate. This Church must strive by all the spiritual resources with which it is possessed to bring those who err or those who differ in the non-fundamentals into its communion. This great good cannot be immediately realized, and both Marshall and Gillespie seemed disposed to agree that private conscience and private worship must be allowed outside its folds.[5] Some order and some direction of spiritual life must be maintained or institutional religion will inevitably perish in England. Presbyterianism is not divinely ordained, but it meets England's needs. With the help of the State it will promote religious life in the nation and, while it will oppress no conscience, it will prevent the dissolution of Church and State into an anarchy of multitudinous fragments.

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[1] Herle, Charles, *The independency on Scriptures of the independency of churches, etc.* (L., 1643), Intro.; T., D., *Irenicum; or, an essay towards a brotherly peace & union, between those of the Congregational and Presbyterian way, etc.* (L., 1659), no pagin.; Rocket, John, *Divisions cut in pieces by the sword of the Lord, etc.* (L., 1650), 48.

[2] Herle, *The independency on Scriptures*, Intro.

[3] Rocket, *Divisions cut in pieces*, 48–49.

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[1] *A vindication of the Presbyteriall-government, and ministry, etc.* (L., 1649), 119.

[2] [Gillespie], *Wholesome severity reconciled with Christian liberty*, 36.

[3] *A vindication*, 120.

[4] The weapons of the Church are purely spiritual. When a man has embraced a religious opinion in reason through the study of the Word he must be regarded as convinced in conscience. The spiritual weapons of persuasion are alone effective against such a man. Christ "worketh by His Word and Spirit upon the spirits of men, inclining them to do His will, by persuading, and not constraining them by any coercive power." His kingdom is planted and maintained by "secret persuasions, and workings, and not by a judiciall external power seated in the ministers constraining to obedience upon bodily or pecuniary penalties." (Moulin, Lewis du, *The power of the Christian magistrate in sacred things, etc.* (L., 1650), 125–129.) Marshall and Manton also shared this view.

[5] [Marshall], *An expedient to preserve peace and amity*, 15–17; [Gillespie], *Wholesome severity reconciled with Christian liberty*, 36.

4. On the problem of heresy and error

The Presbyterian moderates had established in their theory a fairly comprehensive conception of a National Church based upon the fundamentals of Christian faith. They were evidently prepared to embrace Independency and, inferentially, the Baptists within that communion. On these important matters they exhibited striking unanimity. But as Presbyterian thought sought to grapple with the problems raised by militant dissent, with the widespread radicalism which orthodoxy could only condemn as heretical, and with the problem of the restraint and disciplining of error, it betrayed at once the conservative sources of its philosophy and a nervous indecision as to the programme which should be followed. The events of recent years had had a sobering effect upon these thinkers. They were in complete agreement when they argued that error should be extirpated, but they were by no means in agreement that it could be rooted out without provoking a persecution and a resistance which would spell the doom of their own liberalism. In short, as liberals they were not prepared to grasp the thorny staff of extremism with complete enthusiasm.

Gillespie held that the punishment of heresy must be carefully adjusted to the gravity of the offence. It would appear that blasphemy and idolatry should be destroyed,[1] for these offences are both dangerous and easily judged. But heresy and error cannot be punished as certainly or as severely. Light pains should be employed first in an effort to bring the heretic to his senses and to "reserve the threat of severer penalties." Gillespie would apparently not proceed beyond imprisonment and banishment in the punishment of heresy. The restraint of error is not a happy or an easy duty for the Christian Church. But it seems clear that we are commanded to punish at least idolatry and gross heresy by the moral commandment of the Old Testament, which has not been revoked by the New.[1] Heresy threatens the peace and stability of both Church and State and it cannot be permitted to spread without the imposition of restraints.[2] However, we must not be rash or presumptuous in the discharge of this duty. We cannot determine infallibly in these questions and, Gillespie seems to say, our constraint must be directed towards the end of preserving the State and Church rather than avenging God's truth.[3] Gillespie evidently had no taste for the task which spiritual anarchy and unrestrained sectarianism had imposed upon the Church and State, nor had he any illusions about the curative effect of coercion. War must be waged upon gross heresy in the interests of order and decency, but both the weapons and the ends of persecution were severely limited by the Scottish moralist.

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[1] [Gillespie], *Wholesome severity reconciled with Christian liberty*, 32.

Marshall was even more perturbed and undecided concerning the attitude which a moderately conceived Establishment should assume towards extreme error. He reflected that the reformation in England had barely begun and that it must be protected against the infection of heresy during the season of its weakness.[4] Truth must be preserved and defended against the mortal dangers which surround it. On the one hand the papists conspire to drive it out of the world by the bloody arms of persecution, while on the other it is assailed by the steady dissolution of Protestantism into innumerable extremist particles. The sects would deal with truth as Alexander threatened to do with the Ganges: "cut so many channels in it, as it should loose both name and glory."[5] We must cleave steadfastly to the principle that in the matters of faith necessary to salvation, "there is but one way, and one truth; all the rest, is obliquity and error."

The stern duty which the Church must face in England does not command her highest attributes. Discipline too easily degenerates into persecution, zeal into bigotry. We must not forget that the magistrate may not compel belief. Only spiritual agencies are effective in matters of faith. "It is one thing to cause the people to attend the means, and another to make them believe the truth, the first they [the magistrates] must doe, but not the second: Faith is God's gift. It is one thing to hinder idolatry, and blasphemy spreading, another thing to make people renounce an opinion, and embrace the truth."[1] Both the instruments and the ends of religious coercion are strictly limited by the spiritual nature of truth. There is no happy solution to the dilemma of the Church, but it perhaps most nearly fulfils its duty when it confines its coercive activity to the restraint of those who assail it, declining to undertake the hopeless and unchristian task of forcing them to the formal acceptance of its truth. It should be guided by the reflection that the spread of error is far more serious than the simple retention of an erroneous opinion.[2] The magistrate should permit great tolerance in opinions and practices which do not contravene the fundamentals of Christianity,[3] and he should be extremely hesitant in seeking to punish men for fundamental errors which are quietly and privately held. The Church should invoke the coercive arm solely against those sects which err fundamentally and which threaten the unity and peace of Church and State.

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[1] [Gillespie], *Wholesome severity reconciled with Christian liberty*, 7.

[2] *Ibid.*, 12–15.

[3] *Ibid.*, 22–24.

[4] Marshall, Stephen, *The right understanding of the times, etc.* (L., 1647), 7.

[5] *Ibid.*, 20.

But even the punishment of fundamental error should be judiciously and carefully undertaken.[4] The heretic should be reasoned with and admonished. He should be warned that he cannot "divulge his errors." The State, Marshall seems to concede, should not intervene against the most serious heresy so long as it is privately maintained. If the heretic persists in the effort to disseminate his errors, he should, upon conviction of a second offence, be imprisoned for a year and should be required to wear some distinguishing badge which would proclaim his diseased condition. If, after this punishment, the heretic persists in his crime the State should proceed to the extreme penalty of imprisonment for life or banishment. The Established Church should likewise be protected by the provision that unauthorized public preaching will be severely punished, though private meetings should be permitted as a necessary evil.[1]

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[1] Marshall, Stephen, *The power of the civil magistrate in matters of religion vindicated, etc.* (L., 1657), 5, *et vide* 7–8. (This sermon was printed in 1657 but was probably delivered in 1653.)

[2] *Ibid.*, 9.

[3] *Ibid.*, 20; *A censure of . . . Mr. John Cotton, lately of New-England. . . . A brief and solid exercitation concerning the coercive power of the magistrate in matters of religion, by . . . G. Petter, etc.* (L., 1656), 3.

[4] Marshall apparently understood this offence to include idolatry and "heinous blasphemy."

Marshall was gravely disturbed by the problem of the coercion of heresy. He recognized that a policy of repression could not possibly secure even a formal uniformity in England. He shrank from unleashing the coercive authority even against the most serious heresy lest persecution should engulf the Church. He took refuge in the rather shallow distinction between private heresy and the extermination of error by violent means which betrays his extreme dislike of repression and his own uncertainty. In calmer and more settled days Marshall's theory would have been more tolerant. But his doctrinal orthodoxy and his fervent desire for unity could not ignore the destructive forces which in his view were waging relentless war upon the Church of Christ.

This view was shared by the able Vines,[2] who was driven by the logic of his own conception of unity to admit that the magistrate might find it necessary to punish "blasphemous heresy" by death. However, the Church must be exceedingly careful and must err on the side of charity rather than of bigotry. The accusation of heresy has been loosely and carelessly employed. All too often the stronger party exploits it as a justification for the destruction of the weaker.[1] But the Church cannot permit gross heresy to assail the very fundamentals of Christian faith.[2] As a later writer expressed it, the Church must restrain those who "rise up in open rebellion against the king of heaven, and seek to overthrow his sovereignty, by venting foul blasphemies against his blessed self, and those sacred persons that are joyned within the blessed Trinity, by trampling under foot his most precious truths and ordinances."[3]

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[1] [Marshall], *An expedient to preserve peace and amity*, 34–35.

[2] Richard Vines (1600?–1656) was a native of Leicestershire. He was educated at Cambridge, where he proceeded B.A. in 1622. He was a schoolmaster for a time, but in 1627 accepted a charge in Warwickshire. He became well known as a preacher of the Puritan persuasion and in 1642 was invited to preach before the House of Commons. Shortly afterwards he was appointed a member of the Assembly of Divines and was given a rich sequestered living. He was made master of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, in 1644, an office which he filled with notable distinction. In the deliberations of the Assembly and in his later writings he appears as a moderate Presbyterian and, indeed, was not unfriendly to modified episcopacy. His theological views were very similar to those of Baxter, and he shared with the great Presbyterian liberal a steady desire to arrive at some basis of accommodation with Independency. Fuller's judgment of him was most favourable. He wrote that Vines was "an excellent preacher, skilful to cut out doctrines in their true shape, naturally raised, to sew them up with strong stitches, substantially proved, and set them on with advantage on such backs who should wear them." Charles I was profoundly impressed by his charity and moderation during the conversations at Uxbridge. "He was," in the words of Fuller, "most charitably moderate to such as dissented from him, though most constant to his own principles." (Fuller, *History of the Worthies of England*, II, 239.)

Moderate Presbyterianism could propose no effective solution for the religious problems of revolutionary England. The great theorists of this persuasion had renounced the narrow exclusivism of their colleagues without being precisely certain how far the limits of comprehension could be extended without straining the unity and truth of the Church. They retained the conviction that heresy which assailed the fundamentals of truth must be repressed, yet they shrank from lending their support to a really effective theory of persecution. The moderates never wavered in their view that force was wholly ineffective in accomplishing a spiritual regeneration. The door to men's souls "is more easily opened by a key then an iron bar, and mens hearts sooner gained by the power of God then men."[4] They must have realized, at least after 1649, that sectarianism could not be dislodged in England without the employment of a rigorous inquisition and a systematic coercion such as the nation had never experienced. They were quite unwilling to embrace the fanatical philosophy requisite to such a programme, yet they were likewise unwilling to grant the full case of religious toleration. They complained gloomily that no sooner had the black devil of idolatry been destroyed than the "white devill of heresie and schisme, under the name of tender consciences" appeared.[1] Unable to tolerate the extremism either of repression or of sectarianism they proposed a catholic conception of the Church which could not be realized in the England of their day. This fact had been appreciated by Gillespie as early as 1645. While condemning religious toleration on the grounds of principle and equity, he admitted that the State might on occasion find it necessary to embrace it as the lesser of evils. The magistrate may be obliged to govern tolerantly in the hope that the differences which beset the Church will be healed by moderation and persuasion. Such a programme is permissible "so far as [it] is not destructive to the Churches peace, nor shaketh the foundations of the established form of Church government."[2] We may believe that the moderate Presbyterians were prepared to lend their support to a policy of limited toleration if the only other choice confronting the State was the dangerous and destructive repression of sectarianism advocated so relentlessly by their sterner brethren.

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[1] Vines, Richard, *The authours, nature, and danger of hæresie, etc.* (L., 1647), 49.

[2] *Ibid.*, 58–66.

[3] Whitfield, Thomas, *A persuasive to peace, amongst the sons of men, etc.* (L., 1655), 118.

[4] Manton, Thomas, *Englands spirituall languishing; with the causes and cure, etc.* (L., 1648), 13.

5. RICHARD BAXTER, 1615–1691

Moderate Presbyterian theory received its most extended and liberal, though not systematic, vindication in the voluminous writings and busy life of Richard Baxter. It is perhaps significant that Baxter was barely twenty-five when the Long Parliament opened its sessions. He entered the ministry at about this time and from the beginning displayed a remarkable liberalism and breadth of vision. Baxter was untainted by the bitter struggle of Puritanism with Anglo-Catholicism; he could never understand the inexorable rigidity and exclusive pretensions of his elder colleagues who had been steeled in the merciless conflict of a generation, his thought and outlook having been moulded in the enlarged atmosphere of thought which accompanied the collapse of ecclesiastical authority in England. Only in a tenuous sense was Baxter a Presbyterian, even of the moderate school. He dreamed of a catholicity in England so broad as to include the several elements of Protestantism and he renounced completely the dogmatic rigidity and the exclusive pretensions which were the hall-mark of orthodox Calvinistic theory. Baxter's thought should be regarded as stemming from the great school of Latitudinarianism whose unity had been destroyed by the cruel shock of civil war.

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[1] [Gillespie], *Wholesome severity reconciled with Christian liberty*, Intro.

[2] *Ibid.*, 32.

In his autobiography, one of the most valuable and revealing documents of the period under survey, Baxter informs us that even in the early days of his ministry he was guided by the principles of moderation and charity. He was a minister in the Established Church and, despite many Puritan scruples, enjoyed a happy and fruitful experience without straining the bounds of unity. He had entrenched himself upon the essential truths of the Church and had left to the magistrate the task of ordering those circumstantials upon which there was no Christian agreement. He refrained from wearing the surplice, "yet could I not have justified the forsaking of my ministry for it." He regarded the use of the cross in baptism as unlawful, thought the Book of Common Prayer was deficient, disliked the forcing of conscience through subscription, and disagreed with other practices of the Church. But these defects he was content to accept rather than break the unity of a Church which embraced the essential truths. Already he saw that religion in England was threatened by the irascibility and harshness of nonconformity on the one hand and by persecution and tyranny on the other. The imperious policy of the bishops, he held, had borne bitter fruit in England. For persecution invariably defeats its own announced end. "To persecute men, and then call them to charity, is like whipping children to make them give over crying . . . I saw that he that will be loved, must love; and he that rather chooseth to be more feared than loved, must expect to be hated, or loved but diminutively."[1]

It is significant that Baxter made no important contribution to the discussion of the problem of the Church and dissent during the period of Presbyterian dominance in England. He had no sympathy with the narrow zeal of his party or with the rigour of the system of uniformity which they hoped to impose on England. It was not until about 1653 that he began to address himself to the problems which harassed England, and after that date his writings poured out in a steady stream. If Baxter had

[1] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae,* I, 14.

no sympathy with the persecuting philosophy of the extremists, he had little more with the administrative tolerance which marked the religious policy of Cromwell. Yet he felt that within the freedom granted to Christians by the State a noble and disciplined Church might be created upon the ruins of sectarianism. Baxter regarded himself, therefore, as the indirect beneficiary of Cromwell's tolerance.

a. On the Power of the Magistrate in the Church

Baxter dealt only vaguely and unsystematically with the question of the proper function of the Christian ruler in the Church. In part this reticence may well have been inspired by his dislike of Cromwell's objective tolerance and, perhaps more importantly, by the highly spiritual nature of his conception of the Church catholic. Baxter displayed an Elizabethan confidence in the masterful power of truth and felt that the best interests of the Church were served when the ruler remained aloof, leaving to the ministry the task of achieving a fundamental unity and of preserving the truth with which the Church has been invested. Baxter was more profoundly influenced by the Cromwellian definition of the Church than he was prepared to admit.

The Church, Baxter argued, must be conceived and defined in purely spiritual terms. It maintains its faith intact solely by the weapon of excommunication and it enjoys no compulsive resources. Baxter concludes, almost grudgingly, that the civil power is vested with certain responsibilities in its maintenance and defence. The ruler is endowed with a general power of supervision; he appoints its "circumstantial ordinances"; he should investigate and redress scandals in the ministry, and he should punish grievous sins which outrage the Church and harm the civil society.[1] "A liberty to live in sin, or to subvert the Gospel, and the souls of others, the magistrate should give to none; but a toleration in things of a lower nature, that hazardeth not men's souls, nor the unity of the Church, should

[1] Baxter, Richard, *A holy commonwealth; or, political aphorisms, opening the true principles of government, etc.* (L., 1659), 291–294; *Confirmation and restauration, the necessary means of reformation and reconciliation; for the healing of the corruptions and divisions of the churches, etc.* (L., 1658), *Works*, XIV, 554.

be granted to the weak."[1] The ruler should require those outside the Church to live quietly "as expectants,"[2] though this policy is directed towards the preservation of civil peace rather than towards the saving of souls. But the State enjoys no power in the definition or the punishment of error since it is invested with neither competency nor jurisdiction in this matter.

Baxter saw far more clearly than his colleagues that Erastianism was a two-edged sword. The Presbyterians had given to the State very large powers and had imposed upon it the ruinous duty of repressing heresy in subjective certainty that they would dominate the State. They failed to realize that secularism was deeply rooted in English thought and that the control of religious institutions by the lay power would in the end prove fatal at once to their ecclesiastical pretensions and to the discipline which they desired to impose upon the nation. The lay power did assume control of religion in England but the control was exercised in its own interest and with a direction which Presbyterianism regarded as ungodly and destructive to true faith. Baxter realized that the lay temper was predominant in England, that the State had absorbed compartments of life and areas of jurisdiction which the Church had claimed for centuries, that clerical domination of the fabric of government had disappeared forever, at least in England. He consequently sought to elaborate for the Church a framework, an authority, and an identity which did not stem from the uncertain assistance of the temporal State. Catholicity, he maintained, has no connection with the support or approval of the magistrate. The State, he almost contended, is confined in its religious capacity to the disciplining of the clergy and the ordering of the externals of the Church. Above all, it does not discipline the nation at the command or in the interests of the Church.

b. The Renunciation of Bigotry and Extremism

No anti-clerical has ever denounced with more acid and biting strictures the evils of clerical bigotry than did Baxter. He charged that the partisan and fanatical zeal of the Presbyterian extremists had destroyed the possibility of a Protestant catholicity which might have been gained after the destruction of the earlier tyranny of the bishops. This mischievous zeal has been the great obstacle to the attainment of Christian unity.[1] The clergy have sought to impose articles and canons upon Christians in matters upon which God has left no prescription.[2] Vain and cruel men have set themselves up as creed makers, adding so much to the fundamentals of faith that "if one of the primitive martyrs were alive among us, and professed but what was in his ancient creed, he would scarce be taken by many for a Christian. . . . These men themselves believe so much that they know but little; and yet they would have no body know more than they, or no body speake that saith not as they."[3] The clergy have forgotten that they are not vested with coercive power. Their sole weapons are persuasion and sound doctrine. It is true that discipline is necessary for the preservation of the purity and unity of the Church. But we must remember "that discipline must not be made a pretense to any unjust censoriousness, or rigor, much less to tyrannie or revenge."[4] The Church must impose no more than the scriptures clearly warrant, and men must be left free in the quest for truth. Christian unity will be laid in ruins if we seek "to screw men" higher than the fundamentals of faith allow.[5]

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[1] Baxter, Richard, *Catholic unity, etc.* (L., 1660), *Works*, XVI, 500.

[2] Baxter, *Confirmation and restauration*, *Works*, XIV, 550–551.

The Church, then, should be founded in the moderate ground that lies between the fanaticism of persecution and the anarchy of sectarianism. The sharpness, the bitterness, and the bigotry which have characterized English religious life must be renounced if a true Christian unity is ever to be attained. Baxter held the sects to be quite as guilty as the extremists of his own party of the sin of plunging England into an unedifying struggle of warring orthodoxies from which there appeared to be no issue. He alleged that these men had "run up and down from room to room to find the house, and ask, is the parlour it? Or is the hall it? Or is the kitchen, or the coal-house it?" They are too blinded by zeal to see that "every one is a part of it; and all the rooms make up the house."[1] The Church, he held, is not the exclusive possession of any one of the communions that so shrilly proclaim the exclusive possession of its truth. It is composed of the truly righteous who are scattered through all its many branches.[2] Some parts of this Church are sounder and purer than others, but all are required to constitute the whole. Certainly, those who deny the title of Christian to men who are weak are less merciful than was Christ. "I beseech you," he concluded, to "give others leave to live in the same house with you: Do not disown your brethren, and say, they are bastards, because they somewhat differ from you in complexion, in age, in strength, in health, in station," or err in any of those matters which have no relation to the fundamentals which bind all Christians into a catholic unity.[3] Any separate Church which arrogates the name catholic to itself stands convicted of intolerant sectarianism.[4]

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[1] Baxter, Richard, *An explication of some passages in the foregoing propositions and professions, etc.* (L., 1653), 103–104.

[2] *Ibid.*, 104.

[3] Baxter, Richard, *Aphorismes of justification, with their explication annexed* (L., 1649), *Epist.*

[4] Baxter, Richard, *The necessary grounds, ends and principles of a universal concord, between all faithful pastors and churches, etc.* (L., 1660), no pagin.

[5] Baxter, *An explication*, 105.

England will find peace and will gain a truly spiritual unity only when intolerant and bigoted sectarianism yields to charity and moderation. The error which is now so deep-seated can never be eradicated by violent courses. In fact, nothing "so much hindreth the reception of the truth, as urging it on men with too harsh importunity, and falling too heavily on their errors. For hereby you engage their honour in the business, and they defend their errors as themselves, and stir up all their wit and ability to oppose you."[5] Error roots itself in conviction and in pride; persecution only tends to confirm and entrench it.[6] Controversy has proved but a feeble weapon for the advancing of truth. Men when left alone for reflection normally discover their own errors, since the attainment of faith appears to be an intensely personal matter. The Church should discover that it may best redeem a man by seeking to enlarge the knowledge of truth which he possesses. It should realize that "in a learning way men are ready to receive the truth, but in a disputing way they come armed against it with prejudice and animosity."[1] The men of moderate and charitable disposition must regain control of the Church from those who "think there is no settlement . . . till they are in the saddle." We must disown those who "would have a settlement upon too rigorous terms," who denounce as heterodox all who differ from them, who "seeing many minds and waies . . . think that punishment must heal them all," whose conception of unity is to have all their brethren coerced to their own view.[2]

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[1] Baxter, Richard, *The true Catholic, and Catholick Church described* (L., 1660?), *Works*, XVI, 303.

[2] *Ibid.*, XVI, 304.

[3] *Ibid.*, XVI, 307.

[4] Baxter's charity was large. He held that, though the Roman Church was false in a formal sense, there were many true Christians within its communion. (Baxter, *The true Catholic*, *Works*, XVI, 321.)

[5] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 125–126.

[6] Baxter, Richard, *A treatise of self-denial, etc.* (L., 1660), *Works*, XI, 220.

Baxter renounced without reservation the ideal of enforced uniformity which his colleagues had held to be essential to the formation and maintenance of the Church. He disavowed the support of the magistrate, declaring with fine moderation that the Church must win men by the self-evident beauty and purity of the truth which it possesses. The Church must gird itself with purely spiritual weapons in its conflict with error, renouncing completely the rancour, the intolerance, and the fanaticism which have so grievously impeded the progress of God's Word in England. The great Presbyterian posed as the ideal of the Church catholic a loosely organized, broadly conceived, comprehensively defined religious communion which adhered with clear vision to the few and infallible truths which all men agree constitute the essentials of faith. By practice and by theory Baxter sought to bring a torn and distracted England to embrace the unity of this conception which had been elaborated by greater men than he a decade or two before.

c. *On the Nature of the Church*

Baxter's careful consideration of the nature and limits of the Christian Church constitutes his greatest contribution to the development of the theory of religious toleration. He was deeply distressed by the rising bigotry of sectarianism in England, particularly after reflection had convinced him that the various Protestant groups were separated by no religious differences which might be regarded as fundamental. After 1653 Baxter laboured valiantly to impress this view upon English religious opinion and to advance a conception of the Church sufficiently comprehensive to include all Protestant groups.

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[1] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 126.

[2] Baxter, Richard, *Five disputations of church-government, and worship, etc.* (L., 1659), *Epist.*

The Presbyterian thinker shared the Latitudinarian disinclination to reduce the fundamentals of faith to the rigid formulae of creed. This task is too difficult because language cannot be employed to precise use,[1] and dangerous because creeds have customarily been utilized for the suppression of liberty. Still, it is evident that the Protestant communions in England adhere to a common faith, and that they have fallen into violent altercation and intolerance through an uncharitable resolution to enforce eccentric non-essentials as well as the essence of saving faith upon the Christian conscience. Some effort, therefore, must be made to recall men to the catholicity of faith which England in fact enjoys. Surely, when men realize that true unity of faith prevails in the nation, persecution and sectarian bigotry will be regarded as an hideous and cruel sin.

Baxter reduced the saving fundamentals of faith to very narrow limits. Those Christians who profess the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the decalogue are true members of the Catholic Church.[2] Their purity of faith is attested by their devotion to the Bible as the revealed Word of God and by their participation in the rites of worship. All men who adhere to these foundations of faith are truly Christian and deserve our charity and approbation. Some members of the Church may perceive truth darkly and may appear to rend the unity of faith by their violent dissent in matters which are in the last analysis inconsequential, but they remain Christians.[3] They constitute the cross which tests the charity and tolerance of the Church.

Baxter's conception of catholic unity vastly enlarged the limits of Christian liberty. He argued persistently that peace and reformation in England were to be gained by an extension of the bounds of unity rather than by a policy of toleration which perpetuated essential and irreconcilable differences. He was fully aware of the effect of his proposal but challenged his more bigoted critics to refute it by reasonable and Christian objections. When reminded that both the papists and the Socinians were included within his definition of fundamental faith, he replied, "So much the better, and so much the fitter it is to be the matter of our concord: But if you are afraid of communion with papists and Socinians, it must not be avoided by making a new rule or test of faith which they will not subscribe to."[1] Man has been given no liberty to gloss the truth of God. We have been given no licence to impose unnecessary things upon the spirits of others, or to deny liberty of conscience to all who desire to labour earnestly for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.[2] The magistrate should intervene in the interests of unity, protecting and safeguarding by law all communions adhering to the fundamentals of faith from the intolerant zeal of those who would impose a narrow and inflexible religious conception upon the conscience of the nation.

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[1] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, II, 197–198.

[2] *Ibid.*, I, 126, 130–132; II, 198; *The true Catholic*, *Works*, XVI, 288.

[3] Baxter, *The true Catholic*, *Works*, XVI, 290–291.

Intolerance and faction have done a deadly work in England. "Every man that had once given himself to a party, and drowned himself in a faction, did make the interest of that faction or party to be his own." Christian unity and charity in England have been torn by illiberality and by the inordinate zeal of faction. We have forgotten that Christ made men's salvation depend more on an honest and believing heart than "in the strength of wit, and subtlety of a knowing head. He comprised the truths which were of necessity to salvation in a narrow room; So that the Christian faith was a matter of great plainness and simplicity."[3] We have ignored the fact that the Church gains strength from the simplicity of its creed and the largeness of its charity. A satanic intolerance has persuaded over-rigid men to add to the creed, to transform its simplicity into complexity, "to lay all their salvation, and the peace of the Church, upon some unsearchable mysteries about the Trinity," which God has never revealed.[1] The spirit of persecution has destroyed our perspective, dissolved our unity into warring factions, and obscured the eternal verities upon which both persecutor and persecuted have usually agreed.

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[1] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, II, 198.

[2] Baxter, Richard, *A sermon of repentence* (L., 1660), *Works*, XVII, 148–149.

[3] Baxter, Richard, *The right method for a settled peace of conscience and spiritual comfort, etc.* (L., 1653), *Works*, IX, 192–193.

Baxter summoned England to return to a simple, a moderate, and a comprehensive conception of the Church. He denounced as factional and unchristian the extremes which had engulfed his own and other religious parties. England can gain peace only by applying the salve of charity to the wounds which intolerance has opened. "Our calamities [began] in differences about religion, and still that is the wound that most needs closing."[2] The religious problem which has harassed England for so long cannot be resolved by the elevation of one party to exclusive power with the consequent persecution and debasement of those who differ from it. The struggle of rival extremisms for power can have no other consequence than the destruction of religion in the nation and bloody crusades of extermination.

Sanity and moderation must be restored by those Christians who will summon England to the defence of the unity which sectarian interest cannot obscure. In every sect and party there must be men who do not confuse faction with the Church catholic—men who will meet on the broad and catholic grounds that lie beyond the narrow view of any sect.[3] The warring parties might well be united around the common principles which bind them to Christ. They can be made to see that England has been divided by passion, not by principles.[4] No religious division in England is irreconcilable. No one can hold that moderate Anglicanism and moderate Presbyterianism differ essentially or historically,[5] though the intolerant have sought to make it appear that in this division exclusive truth is to be found opposed to complete error. Even this most serious rent in Christ's robe can be repaired. Baxter related that he and Archbishop Ussher agreed in a half hour upon five or six principles upon which moderate Anglicans and Presbyterians might unite without violence to the convictions of either party.[1] Men must be brought to the realization of the awful fact that they are persecuting each other for matters of small consequence, that they are divided by their errors rather than by the truth which they hold in common.[2] If the sects will seek unity in the fundamentals which bind them, renouncing the differences which appear to divide them, the Church of God will prosper in England and peace and liberty will be gained within the comprehensive limits of the Church which Christ has ordained.

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[1] Baxter, *The right method*, *Works*, IX, 193.
[2] Baxter, *A sermon of repentence*, *Works*, XVII, 146.
[3] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 146.
[4] Baxter, *A sermon of repentence*, *Works*, XVII, 146.
[5] Baxter, *Five disputations*, 1–2.

The great Presbyterian divine sought to give effect to the latitudinarian ideal, which he had so ably defended, within the comprehensive limits of Cromwell's State-Church. Having been a preacher at Kidderminster, in Worcestershire, since 1641, he determined in 1653 to endeavour to effect within the county an ecclesiastical association founded upon his conception of catholicity. He appealed to his Anglican, Presbyterian, and Independent colleagues to join in an association devoted to the fundamental tenets of Christian faith.[3] He laid his plans before a meeting of the clergy at Worcester, which instructed him to draft a form of agreement to contain "so much of the church order and discipline, as the Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Independant are agreed in, as belonging to the pastors of each particular church." Baxter was impressed by the fact that the majority of the ministers in his county adhered strictly to no sect, were appalled by the fanaticism which had engulfed England, and were prepared to sacrifice individual opinions in non-essential matters in order to gain unity of faith and charity.[4] He was convinced that such men, whom he described as "meer Catholicks," comprised the great majority of the pious people of England and that their essential tolerance and moderation had been obscured by the noisy pretensions of rival dogmatisms. He therefore sought to devise a formula of association which would bind the particular congregations of the county into a catholic communion, while permitting complete liberty of disagreement in matters which did not concern the simple fundamentals of faith.[1]

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[1] Baxter, *A sermon of repentence, Works*, XVII, 147.

[2] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 146.

[3] Baxter, *An explication*, 106.

[4] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 148.

In the organization of the Worcestershire Association, Baxter and his sympathetic colleagues sought to strip away the differences separating the sectarian groups until the core of religious truth should be revealed. The truth which is the common possession of the churches is plainly manifest in the Bible and may be described as the "antient simplicity of faith."[2] It was the view of the Association that all men who adhere to the scriptures make a full and satisfactory profession of Christianity "till they prove by some inconsistent contradiction that indeed they hold not what they do profess."[3] War and bitterness have obscured the fact that Anglicans and Presbyterians worship the same God and profess the same Christ. Differences have been fostered for partisan ends, an intolerance has arisen which may easily breed persecution, and zeal has brought the bitter harvest of bigotry. England can be saved and charity restored only by founding the Church and defining its limits upon those manifest truths which gain man salvation.[4]

d. On the Treatment of Heresy and Error

Baxter had defined the Church broadly and tolerantly. He had in effect based his conception of catholicity upon the thought of men who, from the time of Acontius, had endeavoured to persuade England that the fundamentals of faith were few, that they were generally held, and that persecution has no place in the Christian armoury. Baxter would have permitted very great diversity of religious opinion so long as men clung to the saving essentials of faith. In his view, very few sects in England were wholly outside the true Church. Consequently he approached the question of the proper treatment of heresy with definitions which narrowed the problem to those eccentric opinions which were universally abhorred by Protestant thought in England.

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[1] Baxter, *Confirmation and restauration*, *Works*, XIV, 554.

[2] Baxter, Richard, *The judgment and advice of the assembly of the associated ministers of Worcester-shire. . . . Concerning the endeavours of ecclesiasticall peace . . . which Mr John Durey doth present, etc.* (L., 1658), 4.

[3] *Ibid.*, 5.

[4] The history of Baxter's Association does not directly concern us. Suffice it to say that the movement spread very rapidly. By 1656 associations had been formed or projected in sixteen counties. Only the conservative Anglicans and the intransigent Presbyterians held aloof. In 1657 Baxter was seeking to expand its constitution to include the Baptists. The associations held out rich promise as a means for healing the sectarian divisions in England. But Cromwell's death, occurring just as they were gaining organization and solidarity, spelled the doom of the idea. The movement disappeared with the Restoration, and Baxter's latitudinarian conception, so he complained, was "crucified" between the "prophane and formal persecutors on the one hand, and the fanatick dividing sectary. . . ." (Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 103.)

Even gross heresy must be treated with restraint and charity. It cannot be denied that serious and dangerous misbelief have arisen in England amidst the confusion of war and the strife of the sectarian groups for mastery.[1] But these heresies cannot be exterminated by violent means. Religious belief is grounded upon conscience, which we are commanded to treat gently. Persuasion and reason are the effective weapons for the cure of heresy.[2] Men who cannot be persuaded cannot be compelled. Baxter held that "nothing so much hindreth the reception of the truth as urging it on men with too harsh importunity, and falling too heavily upon their errors."[3] Violence has the effect of confirming men in their errors, and surely Christian experience has shown that men are quite as ready to suffer for error as for truth. The arm of persecution can secure no more than a false and formal uniformity which conceals the hypocrisy and disaffection writhing under the surface of order. The only way to attain "universal peace is to make all men holy, and the best men more holy."[4] We must remember that spiritual weapons alone are adequate for the mastery of spiritual abuses. If flagrant errors are simply ignored they will usually perish because of their patent falsity. Above all, controversy should not be allowed to stir the coals of faction, and persecution should not be permitted to invest error with the crown of martyrdom.

Force enjoys no legitimate place in religion. Even heresy in the fundamentals, Baxter would seem to hold, does not justify coercive action by the magistrate. Those in error should not be permitted to violate tolerance and charity by gross and flagrant sins. But in this case the magistrate acts in the interests of the civil state. For these carnal people can be restrained only by his power "because they understand no other argument, and can savour nothing but the things of the flesh."[1] Then, too, those heretics who strive to subvert men's souls must be restrained from the active dissemination of their erroneous views. In particular, this applies to Romanism, which should not be permitted to engage in missionary activity or in the public exercise of its devotions in England. Even this restraint, he would seem to argue, may in time be relaxed, though for the moment the distractions which beset the Church in England, the ignorance of the clergy, and the disunited front of Protestantism would make the people too easy a prey for the competent and unscrupulous Jesuits.[2] England cannot yet afford the luxury of Roman Catholic toleration. Yet we should not forget that the Romanists cleave to the fundamentals of faith. Long and bitter controversy has exaggerated the differences which divide them from Protestants. Rome has been guilty of grievous tyranny and of grave corruptions of worship, but her "errours are like a conquerable dose of poyson which nature doth overcome."[3] It is inconceivable that God will reject any man who has sought Him with honesty and love. The Church may not make the way of salvation narrower than God has left it.

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[1] Baxter, Richard, *The unreasonableness of infidelity, etc.* (L., 1655), *Works*, XX, 295 ff.

[2] Powicke, F. J., *The Reverend Richard Baxter under the Cross*, 1662–1691 (L., 1927), 194.

[3] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 125.

[4] Powicke, *The Reverend Richard Baxter under the Cross*, 196.

Baxter had progressed far towards Latitudinarianism during the troubled era which was to culminate in the Restoration. Deeply distressed by the acrid ecclesiastical wrangling which threatened to lay in ruins the Reformation in England, he had steadily enlarged the bounds of comprehension until he was prepared to accept as brethren all men who quietly and earnestly sought God and His truth. Writing in 1660, he confessed that even the fundamentals of faith which he had defined in earlier years perhaps demanded more than Christian charity could require. His faith, he declared, included no more than a "belief of all that God revealeth to me, and my love of God in himself and in all the appearances of his goodness; my trust in his fidelity, and hope of all his promised mercies . . . my assent and consent in general to all the will of God revealed in nature or the Holy Scriptures, as far as I can understand them." This faith, Baxter submitted, was sufficient to win salvation, though it could hardly win the approval of the orthodox.[1] Baxter had taken refuge in that subjective individualism which excludes the possibility of religious coercion on the grounds that it is incompatible with the nature of faith and that it is an offence against the majesty of the human conscience.

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[1] Baxter, *Confirmation and restauration, Works*, XIV, 551.

[2] *Ibid.*, XIV, 557–558.

[3] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 131.

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[1] Baxter, *Universal concord.* (*The first part*) (L., 1660), no pagin.

IV

MODERATE SECTARIAN THOUGHT AND ITS RELATION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERATION, 1640–1660

A. Independency, 1640–1660, and Its Relation to the Development of Religious Toleration

1. General nature of independent thought

English Congregational thought attained its maturity and made its decisive contribution to the religious development of the nation during the period under consideration. We have previously discussed the rise of Congregationalism and have commented on the development of the thought of this communion as it is related to the growth of religious toleration.[1] Congregationalism was weak, ill-organized, and leaderless in 1640. The Laudian persecution had compelled its foremost thinkers to seek refuge abroad, while the maturing of its thought and polity had been delayed by the fact that it and other dissenting groups had been loosely fused by ecclesiastical tyranny into that amorphous coalition which is best denominated as Puritanism. The relaxation of ecclesiastical authority in 1640 resulted almost immediately in the dissolution of English Puritanism into its constituent elements. Congregationalism faced the task of forging a polity and securing a place for itself in English religious life with almost negligible physical resources but with a theory of toleration implicit in its conception of church government and in its thought which was through force of circumstances to attain for it a position of moderate leadership within a few months after the convention of the Long Parliament.

The intolerance of Presbyterian demands forced English Congregationalism to assume the leadership of a movement in protest which had as its guiding principle the advocacy of at least a limited religious toleration. In the long and bitter struggle which ensued Congregationalism was obscured and profoundly affected by the numerous allies that rallied under its leadership. It may be suggested that in the period of the Civil Wars, Congregationalism played the role which Puritanism had undertaken in the preceding era. Not only the more radical sects, but the Erastians and numerous groups of moderates as well, attracted by the tolerant implications of Congregational theory and by the gallant leadership of the Dissenting Brethren in the Assembly, united to form a party unalterably opposed to the establishment of another exclusive religious system in England. Congregationalism was in a sense swallowed up by the greater numbers and the greater tolerance of its own allies. Within a decade, in fact, this coalition had advanced to a position on the question of toleration which did considerable violence to orthodox Congregational theory in several important particulars and was beginning to display doctrinal opinions in no sense tolerable to the staunch Calvinism of Congregationalism.

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[1] *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, I, 261–295; II, 219–258 for a discussion of earlier Congregational theory and history.

Our attention will be focused on the larger movement of which Congregationalism was but part. This movement is best described by the term Independency. Independency drew heavily, particularly during the early years, from Congregationalism, but it proceeded rapidly to a position on the questions of the religious establishment and religious toleration which was only incidentally ecclesiastical. This group was committed to the attainment and defence of religious toleration and as the implications of the Presbyterian programme became clear most of the sectaries and many of the moderates were united under its leadership.[1] After these ends had been achieved, Independency tended to disintegrate into its diverse elements during the period of the Protectorate, since the firm adherence of Cromwell to its religious principles gave every assurance that the great gains which had been won would not be sacrificed.

Independency was in one sense a variant from the main stream of Congregational development. The Congregational contention that each church must be left free and its insistence upon the inviolability of the Christian conscience were seized upon and almost forcibly expanded into a theory of toleration by men rendered desperate by the dread of Presbyterian bigotry. The Independents were prepared to make far-reaching concessions to political circumstances in order to achieve the security of toleration. And, above all, they insisted that religious and civil chaos in England could be averted only by the acceptance of a sectarian religious establishment in the Commonwealth. They were content, in other words, with a sectarian status so long as all other religious communions were denied the tyrannous and exclusive prerogatives which had been claimed in turn by Anglo-Catholicism and Presbyterianism. This position represented a considerable departure from historic Congregational theory and, in combination with other forces, carried Independency far from the Calvinistic moorings. For this group demanded nothing more than that particular congregations should be independent and vested with an unassailable religious sovereignty.[1] Independency proposed to destroy exclusive and tyrannous religious power by resolving it into congregational units too weak to menace the religious liberty which so many in England now demanded. The Independents defended the right of any society of godly persons to assemble for organized worship without interference from the State. This contention attracted wide support from the sects, the army, and powerful lay groups. But it is only remotely related to the Congregational conception of the Church and its organization. Independent theory was essentially individualistic and its spiritual consequences were anarchistic in extreme. It explored logically and conclusively the primary principles of the Protestant Reformation, the sanctity of private judgment and the priesthood of the Christian man, in order to formulate a body of theory to support the system of religious toleration which a new age required.[2]

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[1] Gooch, G. P., *The History of English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1898, *1927*), 120.

During the critical years of the Civil War and the Commonwealth, Congregationalism was submerged in the larger stream of Independent thought and development. It was only at the close of our period, when religious toleration appeared secure, that Congregationalism began to dissociate itself from the complex and widespread coalition to which it had given both inspiration and leadership. However, its connections with Independency remained so intimate, at least amongst its leaders, that no important differentiation in thought can be observed. The main stream of historical Congregationalism during this era can best be studied in America, where the leaders of the predominant Congregational polity in Massachusetts remained relatively unaffected by the momentous events which had engulfed their English colleagues in a struggle so important that the limited theory and religious conceptions of their order were of necessity sacrificed in the service of a larger cause.[1]

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[1] Troeltsch, Ernst, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (N.Y., 1931), II, 666.

[2] Parrington, V. L., *Main Currents in American Thought, etc.* (N.Y., 1927), I, 8–9.

[1] Perry Miller (*Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630–1650, etc.* (Cambridge, 1933)) has given this matter definitive treatment. In the early months of the War the New England divines displayed great enthusiasm for the parliamentary cause. But the sturdily orthodox American Congregationalists were dazed and outraged when the Independents embraced the cause of religious toleration. (P. 277.) New England had been well insulated against the liberalizing consequences of the Laudian persecution prior to 1640 and the infectious liberalism of the radical sects in England after this date. (P. 279.) The Independents were driven to the point of disowning their American brethren by the persistent Presbyterian taunts pointing to the stern intolerance of that colony in which Congregationalism was dominant. In New England the Congregationalists were by no means prepared to renounce the Calvinistic church ideal, and Independent heresy in this particular widened the cleavage. In 1644 all Anabaptists were banished from Massachusetts and Thomas Shepard upbraided the Independents for having strayed so far from godly truth. (*Massachusetts Records*, II, 85; *American Historical Review*, IV, 105–106.)

However, the steadily enlarging liberalism of Independency was not without serious repercussions in the godly commonwealth in New England. The colony was troubled with radical demands after 1644 which Winthrop attributed to the influence of the Independents in the Assembly and Parliament. (Winthrop, *Journal*, II, 279.) The government took stern action against this appearance of radicalism and heavy penalties were provided for heresy and contemptuous opposition to orthodoxy. In 1648 the Westminster Confession was adopted and three years later a Congregational polity was riveted on the colony which expressly sanctioned the restraint and punishment of heresy by the civil magistrate. (Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, I, 25.) It is ironic that the polity which the English Presbyterians demanded was forged in its purest form by the Congregationalists in America at the moment when the exclusive pretensions of Calvinism in England were so decisively shattered.

In view of the wide divergence of Independent theory and colonial Congregational theory in this period the writings of the great American leaders have not been considered, though they enjoyed wide circulation in England. The American thinkers neither understood the problems which their colleagues faced during these years nor sympathized with their solution of them.

From the beginning of the debates in Parliament, which terminated in the abolition of episcopacy, it was evident that there were two irreconcilable views amongst those united in their determination to destroy the Anglican Establishment. The disintegration of Puritanism into Presbyterianism and sectarianism was accomplished in an incredibly short season. As we have previously indicated, the Presbyterians proposed the substitution of a pure and orthodox Calvinistic Establishment which should inherit without much disturbance the powers and exclusive pretensions of Anglicanism. They desired, in short, to seize control of the Church without material concessions to dissenting thought. They announced clearly their intention to erect upon the ruins of Anglicanism an exclusive, intolerant, and infallible church structure which would perpetuate those ills and spiritual grievances that had already brought England to the brink of war.[1]

This resolution was met by an unorganized ferment of opposition from diverse groups which speedily crystallized around the principle of religious toleration under the capable leadership of the Independents.[2] The Independents had no quarrel with the doctrinal formulary which the Westminster Assembly was elaborating,[3] but on the critical issues of church government and discipline they were from the beginning stoutly opposed to the Presbyterian demands.[4] They reduced the coercive power of the Church to impotence by their insistence upon the autonomy of the individual congregation. They denied that any larger unit of spiritual government than the congregation enjoyed validity, since each church stood in direct relationship to Christ and was responsible to Him alone.[5] This position committed them to a frankly sectarian conception of the Church which did violence to the historical territorial and exclusive definition and, it may be argued, accounts for the horror which orthodox thought exhibited when the implications of Independent theory burst upon it in 1643. For the Independents would have excluded the State from areas of responsibility which many pious and thoughtful men held must be maintained lest both civil and spiritual order should be entirely destroyed in England.

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[1] Haller, *Tracts on Liberty*, I, 15.

[2] Short, T. V., *A Sketch of the History of the Church of England, etc.* (L., 1840), 432.

[3] Selbie, W. B., *Congregationalism* (L., 1927), 70.

[4] Clark, G. N., *The Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1929), 311.

[5] Dale, *History of English Congregationalism*, 273–274; Ranke, Leopold v., *A History of England principally in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1875), II, 449; Firth, *Oliver Cromwell*, 144.

Independency exalted the individual conscience to a position that was sacrosanct and denied both to the State and to the Church authority for its restraint. "Religion," it was held, "could not become an organized political unity without ceasing to be religious."[1] The State could not provide men with that illumination which was essential to regeneration, nor could individual religious experience be obtained at the command of civil authority. Man is bound to God by individual ties which the State can neither cement nor loosen.

The tolerant implications of this philosophy were expanded and, indeed, distorted by the heterogeneous groups which advanced from this easily defensible position upon the outworks of Presbyterian rigidity. The sects varied radically in doctrinal matters but they were closely united in their opposition to the Presbyterian pretensions and in their insistence upon the autonomy of the individual congregation. Toleration represented the common principle upon which the sects could federate against their foes.[2] The Independents were at first content with a simple demand for sectarian status and for exemption from the rigid discipline which orthodoxy desired to fix upon the spiritual life of the nation. It was only gradually that Presbyterian inflexibility drove them to champion a larger freedom than they instinctively desired. Fear of persecution compelled them to enlarge the basis of their position and to embrace in the cause of toleration sects whose tenets they continued to abhor. Almost against their will they were compelled at last to urge a toleration, or "at least the great equitie of a tolleration for all religions; that every man should be permitted, without any feare so much as of discountenance from the magistrate, to professe publicklie his conscience, were he never so erroneous, and also live according thereunto, if he trouble not the publick peace by any seditious or wicked practise."[1]

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[1] Fairbairn, A. M., *Studies in Religion and Theology. The Church: in Idea and in History* (L., 1910), 229.

[2] Tanner, *English Constitutional Conflicts*, 129; Dexter, H. M., *As to Roger Williams, and His 'Banishment' . . . with a Few Further Words concerning the Baptists, the Quakers, and Religious Liberty, etc.* (Boston, 1876), 109; and Buckle's interesting remarks, *History of Civilization in England* (Toronto, 1878), I, 360 ff.

2. The development of independency, 1640–1660

There were very few organized Congregational churches in England when the momentous ecclesiastical debates were opened in the Long Parliament in 1641. The parent church in Southwark (1616) had been able to maintain an organic existence since its foundation, but the second church in London, at Deadman's Place, was rapidly embracing Baptist principles under its successive ministers, Canne and How. There were apparently several other loosely organized groups in and near the metropolis, while in Surrey, Kent, Norfolk, and the West of England there were surviving fragments of earlier Brownist congregations that had been periodically weakened by emigration to Holland and America. The physical resources of Independency at the beginning of our period were, then, almost insignificant. In 1640, all of the leading Congregational thinkers were in exile and the effective centres of Congregational thought and development were to be found in Holland and New England.[2]

We have commented at length on the decisive role which Independency played in Parliament and in the army in defeating the stern ecclesiastical demands of the Presbyterians and have discussed as fully as possible the tolerant ecclesiastical system which the Independents reared in England under the leadership of Cromwell. An examination of the evidence makes it clear that Independency was a coalition of many diverse elements united only by their common loyalty to the principle of religious toleration. In an organized religious sense, Independency was not at any time during the period under survey more than an insignificant minority sect. Independency was to achieve leadership in England through the fact that it alone offered a religious programme to which men, weary and fearful of ecclesiastical bigotry, could rally with complete devotion. Historically, Independency was a political and a lay movement whose strength was never substantially expressed in organized religious institutions.

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[1] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 254.

[2] We have previously discussed the history and development of Congregationalism in Holland and in England to the year 1641. (Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 219–231.)

With the collapse of ecclesiastical authority in early 1641 the Independent leaders in Holland returned to England. Thomas Goodwin, Burroughs, and Simpson settled in London and immediately assumed leadership of the inchoate but widespread demand that an enlargement of religious liberty must be the fruit of the abolition of episcopal authority. They were ably assisted in the capital by John Goodwin, who had remained in England, and by Burton, who emerged from prison a popular hero and martyr. In the same year the able and dynamic Hugh Peters arrived from New England. Meanwhile Nye had returned from Arnheim to settle in Huntingdonshire, while Bridge and Ward had come from Rotterdam to resume their work at Yarmouth.[1] All of these men were outstanding preachers and all of them were devoted with varying degrees of intensity to the ideal of a tolerant ecclesiastical settlement in England. Seven of them were appointed as members of the Assembly, where for several years they waged a brilliant and dramatic rear-guard action against the overwhelming Presbyterian majority. They debated, preached, and wrote steadily during the critical years of the Civil War and had within a short time established leadership over a movement, with a base far broader than Congregationalism, which had set itself with unalterable determination against the intolerance of the Presbyterian demands. Baxter observed with amazement that this tiny knot of opposition leaders were able to "drive on others according to their own dividing principles, and sowed the seeds which afterward spread over all the land; though then there were very few of them in the countreys [*sic*], even next to none."[2]

The early Independent leaders were all thoroughly orthodox Calvinists in their doctrinal views and were not hopelessly divided from the majority of the Westminster Assembly even on questions of church government. But they were forced into an opposition that became increasingly sterner and found themselves quite involuntarily vested with the leadership of a movement dedicated to the cause of religious toleration which included a motley array of really radical sects. Presbyterianism and conservative opinion generally refused to distinguish between Congregationalism and the numerous and as yet leaderless sects which were as early as 1641 a source of considerable apprehension to Parliament and to the orthodox. For Independency and sectarianism possessed in common a determination to prevent the erection of an exclusive National Church, while sectarian opinion generally was rapidly coming to base its defence on the doctrine of religious toleration. Conservative thought persistently refused to make any distinction between groups that had embraced this teaching, since it was regarded as the synthesis of all religious error and civil anarchy.[1]

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[1] Dale, *History of English Congregationalism*, 365.

[2] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, 39.

In so far as it was an organized religious body Independency remained a minor sect whose churches and membership bore but slight relation to the great influence which it was to have upon political and religious thought in England. As late as 1653 there were not more than four or five Congregational churches in London, which remained predominantly Presbyterian even after the triumph of Independency.[2] In the Assembly there were seven or eight Independent divines who enjoyed the occasional support of perhaps ten other members on questions directly concerned with religious liberty.[3] But the London leaders exercised a great influence upon the rapid development of a tolerant body of thought. Baylie declared that they had "sett up a number of private congregations in the citie; they are exceeding bussie; we will have much to doe with them."[1] The leaven of their thought was spreading rapidly throughout England and their evangelical efforts in the army were meeting with phenomenal success as early as 1644.[2]

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[1] Thirty-four orthodox titles which attacked the growth of sectarianism were examined in the McAlpin Collection (Union Theological Seminary, New York, N.Y.) for the three years, 1641–1643. Of these, twenty-nine do not dissociate between Congregationalism and the more radical and eccentric sects which were appearing in this period. The principles of Independency and religious toleration were held responsible for the spiritual chaos which had engulfed England, and the erection of a classical Presbyterian discipline was, in most of these works, demanded as the cure for spiritual disorder and dissolution. *Vide* Edwards, *Gangraena*, i, 13, for an example of the loose classification which Presbyterian writers customarily made of the sects.

[2] Powicke, F. J., *English Congregationalism in Its Greatness and Decline, 1592–1770*, in *Essays Congregational and Catholic* (ed. by Albert Peel) (L., 1931), 293.

[3] Von Ranke would appear to suggest that the Independents could muster one-seventh of the vote on these issues. (*History of England*, II, 408.)

The establishment of Congregational churches in the country at large failed to keep pace with the rising influence of Independency in the solution of the vital religious problems of this period. Organized Congregationalism became most firmly established in the ancient nonconformist areas in Norfolk and Suffolk where, it is reasonable to conjecture, something like one-seventh of English Congregational strength came by 1660 to be centred.[3] William Bridge, a native of Norwich, returned from exile with several of his followers in 1641, and two years later formed a church at Yarmouth. In the next year, a Congregational church was established at Norwich. After this date the spread of Congregationalism in the two counties was rapid. Thirteen churches had been organized by 1651, while at the close of our period the number had been increased to thirty-seven.[4]

In the remainder of the country Independency enjoyed but limited success in the establishment of churches. It seems probable that there were in 1660 only nine counties in which there were as many as ten properly constituted Congregational churches.[5] No positive judgment can be given on this question since the extant records are most unsatisfactory and since individual parishes swayed perilously throughout the period in the great arc between Presbyterianism and radical sectarianism.[6] There is good cause for presuming that there were about

[1] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 193.

[2] *Ibid.*, II, 177–185, 186.

[3] There were probably about 150 Congregational churches in England in that year, of which 37 were in Norfolk and Suffolk. Similarly, there were about 360 Independent ministers ejected in 1660–1662, of which number 58 were resident in these counties.

[4] Hosken, T. J., *History of Congregationalism and Memorials of the Churches of Our Order in Suffolk* (Ipswich, 1920), 58–60.

[5] Yorkshire, Lancashire (?), Gloucestershire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Devonshire, Sussex, and Hampshire (?). This estimate is most tentatively advanced on the basis of the number of ministers ejected in the various counties.

[6] The study of individual parishes discloses amazing deterioration and diversity. Thus in the large parish of Halifax (Yorkshire) the living proper

one hundred churches which might roughly be denominated Independent at the time the canvass was made for Cromwell's Nominated Parliament in 1653. It is likewise known that one hundred and twenty churches sent representatives to the Savoy Conference five years later,[1] though in numerous instances congregations failed to do so because of poverty or for other reasons. The *Congregational Year Book* would indicate that about one hundred and forty churches survive in England which claim foundation prior to 1663, but this figure takes into account neither local pride, on the one hand, nor the numerous seventeenth-century congregations that have not survived on the other. We do know that at least 360 ministers were ejected in England during the early years of the Restoration who were described in the returns as Congregationalists or Independents.[2] If the ratio which may be established with some certainty for Norfolk and Suffolk between ejected ministers and properly constituted churches prevailed throughout the country, there were about two hundred and twenty churches of the Congregational order in England in 1660. It seems probable, in other words, that the number of Congregationalists in the nation during our period never exceeded 50,000 persons. Independency gained its strength and decisive influence in the cause of toleration from its sectarian allies[3] and, above all, from the lay groups

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was held during the Civil War period by an Independent, a moderate Presbyterian, and a future Anglican bishop in turn. (Hunter, Joseph, *The Rise of the Old Dissent, Exemplified in the Life of Oliver Heywood, etc.* (L., 1842), 77–78.) In the several chapels of the parish there were serving at one time an Independent, two ministers who conformed in 1660, three Antinomians, two Presbyterians, and a minister who preached despite the fact that he had declined to take the Covenant.

[1] Powicke, *English Congregationalism*, 295.

[2] Turner, G. L., *Congregationalists and the Great Ejectment*, in *Cong. Hist. Transacts.*, VI, i, 35–49.

[3] These diverse groups were not infrequently merged in the same Independent congregation. John Goodwin's famous London congregation is a case in point. Dukinfield Chapel (Lancashire) illustrates this tendency even more clearly. This church was one of the earliest of the Independent congregations, having been founded in 1640 by Samuel Eaton (1597–1665) who had returned from New England in that year. Eaton admitted Baptists, Seekers, and other sectaries to his congregation (Gordon, Alexander, *Historical Account of Dukinfield Chapel and Its School* (Manchester and London, 1896), 14) and in 1646 promoted a petition which demanded in the strongest terms a broadly conceived liberty of conscience.

which impelled it irresistibly to an avowal of the principle of toleration as a religious right and a political necessity.

3. Henry burton, 1578–1648

Henry Burton was the oldest and perhaps the most conservative of the Independent thinkers of our period. We have previously noticed Burton's thought and career during the Laudian regime.[1] His earlier thought had been marked by a vitriolic denunciation of Anglo-Catholicism and by an uncompromising hatred of Roman Catholicism. Burton was released from prison by parliamentary order in March 1641, and shortly afterwards it was voted to restore him to his benefice and to indemnify him by a grant of £6,000. But his uncompromising opposition to the Presbyterian programme soon alienated Parliament and he received neither the living nor the grant. Seizing upon the Parliamentary protestation (May 1641), Burton replied with the vigorous *Protestation Protested* (May 1641), which sought to vindicate the right of dissent from any national establishment which Parliament might frame. He held that the magistrate was incapable of erecting a true Church and demanded that Parliament should recognize the right of godly congregations to an independent existence. The tone of the pamphlet was inflammatory and Parliament imprisoned its printer for some weeks,[2] though it prudently refrained from adding to Burton's already vast prestige. In the following year, the irascible controversialist organized an Independent church in London where he maintained a strong Congregational discipline in order to avoid the virus of sectarianism which his sturdily Calvinistic nature abhorred.[3]

Burton's thought was conservative and he was evidently disturbed by the rise of the sects which were already vehemently demanding the toleration of errors which he regarded as dangerous and intolerable. But when it became evident that Presbyterianism was seeking to fasten another ecclesiastical tyranny upon England the aged writer's views underwent a surprising moderation. He denounced the Presbyterian aims with unmitigated wrath. This group seeks to attain a settlement of religion which will perpetuate all of the evils of Laudian Anglicanism. It endeavours to arrogate to itself a "coercive power both in church and state" and to deliver to the presbytery an infallible judgment in religious matters. The Presbyterians have been quite content to use the sectaries in the struggle with episcopacy, but now "seeing the sectaries had tolleration in their right wing, no tythes in their left wing, and Christ in the battaile" they are resolved to extirpate the very groups that have made their victory possible.[1]

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[1] Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 159–161, 253–254.

[2] *C.J.*, II, 206 (July 10, 1641).

[3] Brook, *Lives of the Puritans*, III, 57.

The dread of ecclesiastical tyranny led Burton to vindicate the inviolability of the Christian conscience in terms of such strength and generality that a doctrine of toleration seems implicit in his argument. No religious system can be permitted to prescribe to the enlightened conscience, and, indeed, it is futile to attempt to force even the erroneous conscience. The limit of constraint upon the conscience is instruction and admonition.[2] "Nothing can resolve, regulate, and settle the conscience, but the Word of God in the evidence of it."[3] The magistrate possesses no power to punish any man for his religious beliefs so long as God's clear commandments and the just laws of the realm are not contravened.[4] We err dangerously when we arrogate such power to ourselves, for in so doing we place ourselves on Christ's throne and pronounce infallibly upon other men.[5] Christian conscience owes allegiance to none other than God, and no human power may usurp His complete sovereignty over it.[6] Religious error is a serious blemish on God's truth, but we should reflect that the Word has throughout history been the sole instrument for its destruction.[1] We must practise humility and patience in our own life and in our attitude towards other men. "Though we are fully persuaded by Gods Word and Spirit, that this our way is Christ's way; yet wee neither doe, nor dare judge others to be reprobates, that walk not with us in it, but we leave all judgement to God, and heartily pray for them."[2]

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[1] [Burton, Henry], *A sacred decretall, or hue and cry. From his superlative holinesse, Sir Symon Synod, for the apprehension of reverend young Martin Mar-Priest, etc.* ((L. ?), 1645), 1–2, 14, 17.

[2] Burton, Henry, *A vindication of churches, commonly called Independent; or a briefe answer to two books, the one, intituled, Twelve considerable serious questions, touching church-government: the other, Independency examined, unmasked, refuted . . . by William Prinne, etc.* (L., 1644), 39.

[3] [Burton, Henry], *The protestation protested: or, a short remonstrance, shewing what is principally required of all those that have or doe take the last parliamentary protestation* (L., 1641), no pagin.

[4] Burton, *A vindication of churches*, 40.

[5] *Ibid.*, 40–41.

[6] Burton, Henry, *Conformitie's deformity. In a dialogue between conformity, and conscience. Wherein the main head of all the controversies in these times, concerning church-government, is asserted and maintained, etc.* (L.,1646), 25.

Burton's unreserved vindication of the sanctity of the determined conscience provided a base from which he could attack with devastating force the claims of exclusive Church systems. He addressed his arguments specifically against Presbyterianism, but he carefully indicated that Calvinistic intolerance was no worse than any other infallible pretension. The *jure divino* argument which had been advanced in support of Presbyterianism was, he held, without logical or scriptural support. The scriptures have expressly preserved Christ's kingly power in the Church from the interference of men. Indeed, He refused even to entrust coercive power to His apostles in matters of indifferent importance. The persecuting power in the Church has no Christian origin—it was usurped by the papacy and remained in the Church of England as an unreformed popish survival. And it now appears that the Presbyterians seek to absorb it from prelacy. They quite forget that the exercise of this power is destructive to religion and subjects all men to the hazards of historical change. The present government happens to be Protestant, but no man can be certain that another Marian regime will not appear. England must remember that such a government can quote scripture and coin arguments quite as convincingly as the Presbyterians. The poison of coercion has become deeply engrained in religious tradition and threatens to stultify the progress that has been made in England towards Christian freedom and a true reformation.[3]

Religion, Burton argued, can be based upon no larger unit than the individual conscience. We must restore to men that freedom and responsibility in which they can find Christ and follow His will. For too long religion has been the monopoly of priests and kings. For too long men have pinned "their religion upon the sleeve either of the priest, as the papists do; or also of the magistrate, as our common protestants do, wrapping all up in an implicite faith and blind obedience." Liberty of conscience must be won in England if liberty itself is to be preserved. The issue between coercion and spiritual freedom must be met squarely. England should elevate as an article of faith the principle that Christ alone is Lord over conscience and make certain that "no power on earth may usurp authority, upon what pretence soever, to make and impose what laws they please to bind the conscience, or to regulate the churches of God."[1]

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[1] Burton, *A vindication of churches*, 41.

[2] *Ibid.*, 56.

[3] Burton, *Conformitie's deformity*, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15.

Burton's thought during the era of the Civil War stands in amazing contrast to the bigoted Puritanism which he had displayed during the Laudian regime. He remained a conservative Congregationalist but it is evident that the threat of an intolerantly conceived Presbyterian regime in England had a moderating and liberalizing effect upon his thought. We may believe that countless men in the nation, humbler and less articulate than the testy Burton, shared his apprehensions and embraced religious toleration as the only practicable solution of the spiritual dilemma in England. Burton displayed the normal Calvinistic detestation of error, but when faced with a choice between tyranny and error he was unflinching in the liberality of his convictions. He was comforted in this decision by the reflection that the spiritual weapons with which the Church had been endowed had through the ages proved effective in the maintenance of truth. The human conscience cannot be forced and no ecclesiastical system can be truly grounded in the Word of God which does not protect men in their divine prerogative to seek and find God in their own way. The pressure of circumstances caused Burton to uphold in the strongest terms the complete individualism implicit in Independent thought and to accept the theory of toleration which flows as a necessary consequence from this position.

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[1] Burton, *Conformitie's deformity*, 23, 25–26.

4. Jeremiah burroughs, 1599–1646

One of the most able and certainly the gentlest of the Independents was Jeremiah Burroughs, whose untimely death in 1646 cut short a career of rich promise. Burroughs had been educated at Cambridge, where he proceeded M.A. in 1624. Shortly afterwards he left the university, having embraced nonconformist teachings, and for some time assisted Calamy in his pastorate at Bury St. Edmunds. He held a living in Norfolk from 1631 until 1636, when he was deprived for nonconformity. Declining numerous offers from rich friends, Burroughs emigrated in the following year to Holland, where he undertook the pastorate of an English congregation.[1] Returning to England in 1641, he was granted charges at Stepney and Cripplegate, and was immediately recognized as one of the leaders of Independency. As a member of the Westminster Assembly Burroughs was an outspoken foe of the Presbyterian discipline and plan for church government, subscribing to the important *Apologeticall Narration* which was laid before Parliament in 1644. He was perhaps the most conciliatory of the great Independent leaders, striving against insuperable odds to find some basis for an accommodation which would prevent the rending of the Calvinistic groups into innumerable fragments.[2] Nevertheless, he was unyielding in his opposition to an exclusive religious system and declared that the Independents would have no choice but to emigrate once more if the structure which the Assembly was forging should be imposed upon England. Burroughs wrote with fine distinction, with a wealth of imagery and homely simile, and with a closely knit and sweeping logic which compares favourably indeed with the theological writers of his age. He remained even-tempered, moderate in his views, and objective in his argument despite the implacable opposition which he offered to the ancient ideal of an enforced uniformity.

The question of religious toleration, Burroughs suggested, was rapidly dividing England into opposing camps and should consequently have the most careful and patient consideration. He maintained that the issue really hinged upon a dispute concerning the rightful power of the magistrate in the Christian Church. Burroughs could discover neither in scripture nor in logic any ground for vesting in the magistrate the slightest coercive power in religion. Those who would shackle the Church to the civil State display an amazing misconception of the true nature of religion. It is not the function of the prince to command every good thing and to punish every evil. "The abstruse controversies in religion, come not under the cognisance of the magistrate. . . only such things as are against the rules of common justice and equity." The State, in short, is competent to judge in matters of fact, but has been invested neither with the authority nor with the means for determining matters of conscience. If a man's religious errors lead him to violate the civil order or to endanger the State, he should be punished accordingly, but in this instance the offence and the penalty are clearly civil. However, the distinction between civil offences and religious errors must be kept sharply separate. For there is no external power which can reduce men by fiat to a uniformity of belief. Such an attempt is an hideous violation of conscience and endangers the very structure of faith and civil organization.[1]

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[1] Brook, *Lives of the Puritans*, III, 19; Burroughs, J., *A vindication of Mr. Burroughes, etc.* (L., 1646), 18–21; Heylyn, Peter, *Cyprianus anglicus: or, the history of the life and death of* [*William Laud*] (L., 1668), 367.

[2] Neal, *History of the Puritans*, II, 427.

The confusion between spiritual and temporal weapons is old in Christian history, and infinite misery and persecution have been its consequence. It would seem that England, so recently delivered from the cruel yoke of tyranny, would instinctively realize that persecution and bigotry have no place in Christ's Church. But the Presbyterians, Burroughs pessimistically complained, seek to perpetuate an intolerance under which they so recently suffered. They now rise "to oppose a forbearance of their brethren, who together with them love Jesus Christ, and agree with them in the substance of worship, and the doctrinal part of religion."[2] They have closed their ears to the misery of those who desire peace and liberty to serve God in their own way. "Let us not be brought again into bondage,"

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[1] Burroughs, Jeremiah, *Irenicum, to the lovers of truth and peace, etc.* (L., 1646), 28–33.

[2] Burroughs, Jeremiah, *A sermon preached before . . . the House of Peers . . . the 26th of November*, 1645 (L., 1646), in Waddington, J., *Congregational History*, 1567–1700, *etc.* (L., 1874), II, 460–461.

Burroughs implored, "and have nothing to lighten our bondage but a new name. Let not violence be used to force people to things spiritual that they know not."[1] The religious deliberations of Parliament and of the Assembly should be respected but neither body can discover the way of truth for any man. He warned Parliament lest it permit its great authority to be exercised against those who "do what they can to know the mind of Jesus Christ, and would fain understand and practise more, only they dare not go further than they can see Christ before them."[2] Salvation is attained by the free play of God's spirit and the force of His Word upon individual men and women. No nation can be saved by the formulary of a synod or the order of a Parliament, in however great piety such a creed may have been conceived.

All exclusive and infallible religious systems, Burroughs held, do infinite violence to the very essence of religion. Coercion has no place in the religion of Christ. So long as men imagine that all Christians can be forced to the same opinions, so long as they believe that all controversies and divisions can be resolved by punishment and persecution, so long as they refuse to admit the existence of a middle ground between a strict uniformity and spiritual anarchy, there must needs be "a base subjection of men's consciences to slavery, a suppression of much truth," and great "disturbance in the Christian world."[3] When men are entrapped in the evil toils of intolerance and bigotry, they stray far from the true course which Christ has prescribed for His Church. Violence and hatred are engendered and divisions are enlarged by the very animosity with which they are considered. Arrogance and pride seize the mind and we become "angry with men rather because they are divided from ourselves than because they are divided from the truth."[4] Heresy becomes synonymous with difference of opinion; brutal force becomes the weapon of God's ministry. To employ repression on men before they have attained the full measure of truth, Burroughs eloquently concluded, "is to seek to beat the nail in by the hammer of authority, without making way by the wimble of instruction. Indeed, if you have to deal with rotten, or soft, sappy wood, the hammer only may make the nail enter presently, but if you meet with sound wood, with heart of oak, though the hammer and hand that strikes be strong, yet the nail will hardly go in. It will turn crooked or break; or, at least, if it enter, it may split that wood it enters into; and, if so, it will not hold long." And, Burroughs proudly warned Parliament, there was no other country as famous for its firm, strong oaks as England.[1]

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[1] Burroughs, Jeremiah, *A sermon preached before . . . the House of Peers . . . the 26th of November*, 1645 (L., 1646), in Waddington, J., *Congregational History*, 1567–1700, *etc.* (L., 1874), II, 461.

[2] *Ibid.*, II, 462.

[3] *A vindication of Mr. Burroughs*, 30.

[4] Burroughs, *Irenicum*, 5.

Burroughs had dealt at some length with the grave issues which confronted the Church in England and had treated with calm moderation the great dangers which he held to be inherent in bigotry and persecution. He had scrupulously separated himself from orthodox opinion by a complete denial of religious authority to the magistrate. He warned thoughtful men of the intolerance underlying the Presbyterian solution to the English religious problems and he denounced with great vigour the iniquity of all coercion in religious life. The great preacher then turned his attention to problems which Independency was just beginning to consider carefully—problems which required immediate solution. England was confronted with a rapidly expanding diversity of sects, each claiming to possess religious truth and each demanding freedom and scope in the settlement which Parliament was struggling to define. Both Anglicanism and Calvinism met this problem with exclusive claims which in the final analysis presumed a resolution to exterminate diversity. The earlier Congregationalists had given neither frank nor full consideration to this matter, having been content to rest their case upon a plea for toleration for their own communion on the unconvincing ground that they differed only in particulars from orthodoxy. Burroughs, writing as an Independent, added substantially to the discussion of what seemed to be an insoluble dilemma by addressing himself objectively and thoughtfully to the issue of toleration and the question of diversity of faith.

The Independents, he submitted, hold no brief for absolute liberty for all religions and errors. But they are convinced that spiritual errors can be cured only by spiritual remedies. They would impose no penalties upon heresy beyond excommunication, which has been vested in the Church as the ultimate sanction for the protection of purity of faith. They would bind the conscience and assail the judgments of no one with external penalties. "We sail up to our brethren as far as we can see the line of truth, and beyond it we dare not venture in the least."[1] Differences may gradually be composed when we treat them moderately and charitably, but they are only confirmed when we seek to resolve them imperiously. The human conscience has been left absolutely free and Christ requires no man to accept the judgment of another unless His way is clear to the mind and heart. Compulsion serves no other purpose than to obscure the light of truth. Moreover, we should reflect that, "although differences be very sad, yet the truth that comes to light by them may recompense the sadness." History teaches us that when the persecuting power has been strongest the spiritual zeal of the Church has been weakest.[2] The Church thrives best in an atmosphere of tolerance and spiritual liberty. We must endeavour to secure those conditions in England by granting to all men that liberty which we require for our own salvation.[3]

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[1] Burroughs, *A sermon*, in Waddington, *Congregational History*, II, 462.

The hydra of diversity, Burroughs maintained, is a monster conjured up by inflamed passions of arrogance and bigotry. He pointed out quite calmly that England's spiritual freedom was still new and that eccentric opinions would inevitably appear for a season. Diversity of opinion is, in fact, a clear indication that truth has been suppressed and enquiry has been restrained for too long. This diversity testifies at once to the failure of a long and tyrannous restraint and to the disposition of man to seek truth freely when opportunity is afforded. The variety of opinions on religious matters is in reality an evidence of a restored spiritual vitality in the nation and should cause no apprehension. For those "things that the saints are conversant about, are great things, things of a high nature; about their last and their eternal estates; hence every one is very chary and careful, and strongly set to maintain what he apprehends

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[1] Burroughs, *Irenicum*, 47.
[2] *Ibid.*, 63.
[3] *Ibid.*, 95–97.

. . . and when there are different apprehensions of those things . . . even amongst godly men, they must needs stand out one against another till God causes one of them to see things otherwise than now he doth." We must be extremely careful lest we confuse differences about religion with different religions. This mistake, Burroughs suggested, has possessed the Presbyterians. God does not desire and we should not seek a lifeless, dull, and inert uniformity of opinion. Every man is a mirror reflecting faith with subjective shades and variations that bespeak the individuality of his own nature. "It is with the saints here," Burroughs concluded, "as with the boughs of trees in time of a storm. You shall see the boughs beat one upon another as if they would beat one another to pieces, as if armies were fighting; but this is but while the wind, while the tempest, lasts; stay awhile, and you shall see every bough standing in its own order and comeliness: Why? because they are all united in one root; if any bough be rotten, the storm breaks it off."[1]

In summary, Burroughs had very considerably advanced Independent thought on the questions of religious toleration and diversity. His views carried weight not only because of his patent sincerity and objectivity, but because of the nobility and sweep of his observations. He did not seek to formulate a positive theory of toleration, nor did he address himself to the question of the proper treatment of Roman Catholicism and the extreme sectarian groups. His interest was centred on the problems of the mutual relations and accommodation of the various Protestant groups of common origin in England. But the very nature and universality of his arguments could be extended logically and without violence to their spirit to include all men of all religious persuasions. Burroughs laid bare the shallow and dangerous theory which had long undergirded the persecuting power of Church and State. Not only was coercion ineffective, it was completely irreligious. He declared his allegiance to the principle of unrestrained individualism in the search for religious truth. No power can be permitted to interpose itself between the enquiring man and his God. A nation which has invested religion with freedom will appear to the jaundiced and cruel eyes of the arrogant to be torn with diversity and dissension. But such a nation has made available to all men the means by which God's truth may be apprehended; the diversity which it exhibits betokens the vitality, variety, and luxuriance of its spiritual life; and the Church, composed of those who have found God, will prosper and grow in stature when its roots explore deeper and deeper into those vast reservoirs of truth which God has left to the enquiring spirit.

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[1] Burroughs, *Irenicum*, 102 ff.

5. *AN APOLOGETICALL NARRATION*, 1643

The essential conservatism of Congregationalism was being transformed by the inflexible temper of the Assembly of Divines into the powerful radicalism of Independency. This movement was in one sense a reflex to the uncompromising attitude which Protestant orthodoxy in the Assembly displayed to all forms of dissident thought. Puritanism had, in the early Stuart period, been hardened in the Calvinistic mould by the steady pressure of Anglo-Catholicism. It was transformed into Presbyterianism in the early years of the Civil War by a variety of influences. The Anglican Establishment had been destroyed and men who could not conceive of a national religious life save in institutional terms grasped the ordered discipline of Presbyterianism as the best insurance against the dissolvent of religious radicalism which was steadily eroding the fabric of ecclesiastical uniformity. Further, there was a widespread feeling that the English religious structure should be brought into close correspondence and conformity with organized and militant Protestantism in Scotland and abroad in order to repair the grave damage which Laud had done to the historic Protestantism of the Church of England and to ensure England against isolation in the troubled period which evidently lay ahead. But most important was the fact that respectable religious opinion was both outraged and alarmed by the ever-spreading evil of sectarianism and heresy which had been the inevitable consequence of the relaxation of ecclesiastical authority. Anglicanism having been discredited, Presbyterianism came to be regarded as the best possible safeguard against the further deterioration of English spiritual life. The enthusiasm for Presbyterianism was, then, principally negative in its sources, and this fact may be held to account for the amazing collapse of its influence when political and religious circumstances were abruptly and importantly changed towards the close of the first Civil War.

The Independent leaders in the Assembly were not insensible to these influences and during the early years of its deliberations they reviewed the problems of dissent and toleration with no larger perspective than the fate of their own communion (Congregationalism) in a Presbyterian National Church. When it became apparent that the Presbyterian majority at Westminster were "determined to make themselves undisputed heirs to the lapsed or endangered powers of the church and to approve nothing short of a system by which all the forces of society were to be brought to bear to compel obedience to church discipline,"[1] the Independent members were obliged to examine carefully the increasing danger to which their position was subjected. These members precipitated a crisis in English religious history by the publication, probably in early January 1644, of the *Apologeticall Narration*, the joint manifesto of Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, William Bridge, Jeremiah Burroughs, and Sidrach Simpson. The pamphlet considered with fine gravity and propriety the reservations which Congregationalism must claim in the Calvinistic State Church envisaged by the Assembly. The subscribers were careful to emphasize that they were orthodox in doctrine, that they pleaded for no ruinous toleration of heresy and error, and that their views were not incompatible with those of the Presbyterians.[2] The document achieves its importance in the fact that it effectively and deliberately transferred the debate from the insulated walls of the Assembly to the floor of Parliament and to the forum of national discussion. Almost immediately diverse and radical sectarian groups and thoroughly Erastian or sceptical laymen, having been given a platform of protest, undertook to enlarge vastly the breach which had been made in the walls of orthodox thought. Almost insensibly Independency was transformed into a powerful movement whose genius and thought were lay in character and whose sole cohesive force was devotion to the principles of religious toleration. The violence of the Presbyterian attacks upon the *Apologeticall Narration* assisted largely in the fusion of Independency, since Presbyterian intransigence was demonstrated and since those who grasped the cudgels in support of Independency speedily enlarged the discussion by the defence of principles which could not be found in the *Apologeticall Narration* save by a violent wrenching of both the spirit and the text of that inoffensive document.[1]

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[1] Haller, *Tracts on Liberty*, I, 48.

[2] Masson, David, *The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connexion with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of His Time* (L., 1871–1894), III, 111.

For the "dissenting brethren" defined their position with great moderation and caution. They recalled that they had earlier chosen exile rather than submit to the corruption and superstition of the prelatical church.[2] But even then they had refrained from schism; they had continued to regard the Church of England as a true Church despite its defects.[3] They have pursued the course which conscience has prescribed without ambition or sectarian bias. "We had no new common-wealths to rear, to frame church-government unto. . . . We had no state-ends or political interests to comply with; no kingdoms in our eye to subdue unto our mould."[4] The Independents desire unity and will submit to such light as God bestows upon them. For they have always regarded the Bible as the pillar of their faith. Accordingly, they have resolved "not to make our present judgment and practice a binding law unto ourselves for the future." But they can move no faster and no farther than the light which they have permits. The *Apologeticall Narration* made it very clear that Independency rested its resistance to the exclusive pretensions of Presbyterianism upon the unassailable rock of conscience. It declared the belief that truth lay in the middle way between the confusion of lawless sectarianism and that "which is the contention of these times, the authoritative presbyteriall government."[1] The manifesto pleaded for room and scope in the religious settlement which was being framed for "an happy latitude and agreement" for those of the Congregational way who could not in conscience accept every detail of Presbyterian government and discipline as clothed with the authority of Holy Writ.

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[1] Presbyterian thinkers sensed that the position taken in the *Apologeticall Narration* would undergo immediate exploitation and expansion at the hands of the various groups then combining into Independency. It was pointed out, too, that the stand taken by the Independent leaders in the Assembly could be enlarged to support a general doctrine of toleration. The Presbyterian attack began at once and for more than a year was waged with increasing ferocity. We have examined forty-one titles published in 1644 in which Presbyterian authors themselves assisted in the formation of Independency by a distortion of the position of the "dissenting brethren." Among the more important of these pamphlets are: *Reformation of Church-Government in Scotland, cleered from some mistakes and prejudices, etc.*; Baylie, *Satan the leader in chief to all who resist the reparation of Sion, etc.;* Rathband, W., *A most grave, and modest confutation of the errors of the sect . . . called Brownists, etc.;* Steuart, *Some observations and annotations;* Steuart, *The second part of the duply to M.S.;* [Forbes, Alexander], *An anatomy of Independency, etc.;* Edwards, T., *Antapologia;* Vines, R., *The impostures of seducing teachers, etc.;* Geree, J., *Vindiciae ecclesiae Anglicanae;* Prynne, *Twelve considerable serious questions touching church government, etc.*, and *A full reply to certaine briefe observations and anti-queries, etc.;* Rutherford, S., *The due right of presbyteries, etc.*

[2] [Goodwin, Thomas, *et al*], *An apologeticall narration, humbly submitted to the honourable Houses of Parliament*, 1–3.

[3] *Ibid.*, 6–7.

[4] *Ibid.*, 3.

The *Apologeticall Narration* confined its plea to a vindication of the right of Congregationalism to exist under a Presbyterian National Establishment. It specifically renounced any support of a general principle of religious toleration, and spoke with orthodox fervour against the rising menace of sectarianism. But the manifesto pleaded for particular liberties with logic and conviction likewise valid for general liberties. This first modest vindication of Independency was shortly to be expanded, principally by the allies of Independency, into a demand for religious liberty on the grounds both of religious right and of political necessity. In this great movement, whose velocity carried its clerical leaders far from their original moorings, even the framers of the *Apologeticall Narration* were profoundly to broaden the scope and content of their thought.

6. THOMAS GOODWIN, 1600–1680

The leading spirit in the framing of the *Apologeticall Narration* was Thomas Goodwin, one of the most respected and influential of the English clergy of his generation. Goodwin had been educated at Cambridge, where for some years after his graduation he remained as a fellow. In 1628 he was elected lecturer at Trinity Church, Cambridge, and four years later was chosen vicar. In 1634, however, he embraced Congregational principles which caused him to resign his charge. After preaching to separatist conventicles in London for several years, Goodwin emigrated to Holland in 1639. He returned to England in the next year to organize a congregation in the parish of Saint Dunstan's-in-the-East, along Independent lines. He was regarded as the foremost Independent leader in the Assembly, where he was irreconcilably opposed to the Presbyterian system despite his completely orthodox theology. Goodwin was made president of Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1650, where he also organized an Independent congregation which he served as pastor. He remained constant to the ideal of a comprehensive national settlement of religion and with Owen assumed the leadership in the Savoy Conference which drew up a constitution for Congregationalism. Goodwin was deprived in 1660, but apparently continued to preach for years without serious molestation to an Independent congregation in London.[1]

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[1] *An apologeticall narration*, 24.

Goodwin remained throughout his life a thoroughly orthodox Calvinist in doctrine. He had observed the rise of radical sectarianism with grave apprehensions and in the early sessions of the Assembly disowned completely any religious settlement which would extend toleration to these disintegrative forces. At the same time, however, he was not disposed to accept the intolerant and exclusive Presbyterian system as a solution to the problem of error. He was accordingly driven, as it became evident that orthodoxy would effect no compromise with conservative dissent, to a position which represents a remarkable enlargement of his earlier views.

The diversity which had come to mark the spiritual life of England could not be corrected, Goodwin held, by the rigorous remedies that were proposed so zealously by orthodox opinion. In fact, England has become too sensitive to diversity of opinion. Small differences are unduly magnified and are made grounds for dissension. We should reflect that in matters of faith God is the sole judge: "To judge thy fellow servants in matters of this nature, is an invasion of, and intrusion upon God's proper right."[1] God alone can bring men to a common judgment in faith and we must be scrupulous indeed in seeking to impose an infallible system of truth upon the Christian conscience. In particular, Goodwin urged Parliament to "establish nothing but what you have full, cleare, and generall light for . . . condemne nothing and suffer nothing to stand condemned, in which, you in your consciences are doubtfull, there may be a truth."[2] Faith cannot be stretched to a single pattern by prescription. Even the attempt to do so works incalculable harm to the human conscience and to the vitality of faith. Diversity of opinion, if not salutary, is at least inevitable, for "there will be one believing one thing, and another believing another thing; and it will be so to the end of the world."[3]

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[1] A definitive life of Goodwin would throw much needed light on the reaction of a conservative Congregationalist to the development of Independency. The brief sketch of his career which we have given is based upon Wood, Calamy, Neal, Turner, *Original Records of Early Nonconformity*, and the *D.N.B.*

Religious diversity, then, prevails because it is permitted by the inscrutable will of God. It may well be that it arises because our knowledge of truth is limited. Our advancement towards a fuller understanding of divine truth will dispel the differences which divide Christians. When men embroil themselves in controversy and persecution because of diversity, they only hinder the progress of enquiry and truth. The basis of Goodwin's advocacy of religious toleration is to be found in his steady conviction that diversity could be healed only by spiritual means. We should constantly reflect that Christ died in order to end the enmity which assailed His people. This is the one foundation of our faith and of liberty of conscience.[4] This is not to say that atheists, infidels, and the heathen should be extended liberty of worship, nor does it restrict the Christian zeal for truth. It means rather that we must extend liberty and tolerance to all men who seek earnestly to find God's truth. For such men, even when mired in error, hold to a portion of essential faith. When we seek to eradicate their errors by forcible means we endanger their precarious grip upon saving faith.[5]

[1] Goodwin, Thomas, *An exposition of the first and second chapters of the Epistle to the Ephesians*, *Works* (Edinburgh, 1681–1704), I, 240.

[2] Goodwin, Thomas, *Zerubbabels encouragement to finish the temple* (L., 1642), 35.

[3] Goodwin, *An exposition*, *Works*, I, 241.

[4] Goodwin, Thomas, *Of the constitution, right, order, and government of th Churches of Christ* (L., 1696), *Works*, IV, 399.

[5] *Ibid.*, IV, 399–400.

Neither the magistrate nor the Church, then, may employ violent courses in the punishment of heresy. So long as men profess Christ they must be tolerated no matter how weakly or corruptly they grasp His truth.[1] It follows that Goodwin would extend at least modified toleration to all groups in England save the atheists, the non-Christians, and, possibly, the Roman Catholics.[2] For the saving articles of faith have been common to all Christians since the foundation of the Church. To persecute any sect for dissent, therefore, is to persecute the Church of Christ.

Goodwin's defence of religious toleration, while never exhaustively developed, was clear and well argued. He rested it upon the conviction that all of the Christian communions possessed at least the essentials of faith, and he stoutly declined to draw the line of truth and error between any of these fragments of a pervading catholicity.[3] This position he declared to be unassailable, "let them come with all their arguments out of the Old Testament, I will but only preach Jesus Christ . . . my assertion is, that saints, or persons professing Christ, tho' they differ, yet being in Christ, they ought not to judge or despise; but forbear one another according to Christ."[4] Religious toleration, therefore, follows as a positive spiritual necessity in the relations of one Christian sect to another and in the attitude of the State towards the various religious communities which compose it.

The necessity for religious tolerance is apparent, moreover, from the negative fact that physical restraint and persecution have no place in Christian conduct. We live under an explicit commandment to love one another and to bear the burdens of the weak.[5] We violate this rule of charity when we proscribe those who differ from us as schismatic. Faith, Goodwin reminded the Presbyterians, cannot be confined to an infallible creed which stultifies the advancement of truth and harasses the individual conscience. The saint is an enquiring man who must progress by his own resources in the quest for knowledge. The very essence and vitality of religion is consequently destroyed when imperious men endeavour to restrain Christian freedom by the use of "worldly force, and compulsion."[1] This persecution differs neither in spirit nor in particulars from that which has disgraced the Roman Church. Those who would persecute invariably hold that they seek peace and uniformity. But they are both mistaken and arrogant: "As if the only way to peace. . . were to impose the more common, and generally prevailing opinions concerning faith, and worship, upon others who do dissent," and to compel them to a way which bigotry has prescribed. And it is peculiarly ironical, Goodwin concluded, that in England the Presbyterians who have so recently felt the lash of an imperious orthodoxy now desire to compel others to accept their particular gloss upon religion by the identical weapons of coercion and intolerance.[2]

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[1] Goodwin, Thomas, *Of the constitution, right, order, and government of the Churches of Christ* (L., 1696), *Works*, IV, 401.

[2] Goodwin does not speak with clarity on the question of Roman Catholic toleration. He does declare, however, that Catholicism bears "a true likeness and conformity to the heathenish religion." (Goodwin, Thomas, *An exposition upon the Revelation*, *Works*, II, 64, *et cf.* II, 47.)

[3] See Baylie's interesting comment on this statement, *Letters and Journals*, II, 343–344.

[4] Goodwin, *Of the constitution . . . of the Churches of Christ*, *Works*, IV, 401–402.

[5] *Ibid.*, IV, 402.

Though Thomas Goodwin failed to deal exhaustively with the question of religious toleration, his thought must be regarded as of very great consequence in the moulding of conservative sectarian opinion on the problem. Goodwin wrote with a blunt kind of honesty; he dealt carefully and critically with questions about which there was a great deal of bigoted opinion; and the very conservatism of his doctrinal position lent authority to his views in an age notable for radical and inflammatory writing. Goodwin laboured throughout our period to secure the establishment of a Calvinistic State Church which would ensure latitude to the various Protestant communions. But if that were not possible, he clearly preferred religious toleration of a most extensive nature to the erection in England of another system of enforced uniformity. The diversity of faith which so distressed the orthodox, Goodwin regarded as ephemeral differences which did no violence to the unity of faith held by all who professed the name of Christ. Men must be given latitude; that habit of enquiry which is the essence of spiritual vitality must not be repressed in the interests of a dead and formal uniformity. The Church must be conceived as embracing all men who seek Christ, no matter how imperfectly they may apprehend His truth. Persecution of error can serve no other end than the violation of conscience, the rending of the Church, and the stultifying of those resources wherewith men attain fulness of spiritual stature. Thomas Goodwin had almost unconsciously conceded the full grounds of religious toleration.

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[1] Goodwin, *Of the constitution . . . of the Churches of Christ*, *Works*, IV, 406.

[2] *Ibid.*, IV, 406–407.

7. JOHN GOODWIN, 1594–1665

John Goodwin gave to religious toleration the ablest and most systematic defence which it was to receive during the period under survey. Goodwin was chiefly responsible for the enlargement of Congregational thought into Independency, and his prolific and provocative pen, during a critical period, gave to the Independent position clarity, vigour, and persuasiveness. Just as Independency was about to gain its demand for sectarian status, Goodwin progressed to an even more radical and unorthodox position, endowing a large group of sectarian pamphleteers with a vast mine of thought and speculation which was to serve during the remainder of our period as a quarry for those devoted to the principles of religious toleration. Seldom indeed in English thought has any man exercised so profound and decisive an influence upon historical and religious development as did this interesting and complex figure.

Goodwin was born in Norfolk in 1594. After his education at Cambridge he returned to his native county, where for several years he was a popular preacher of more than local reputation. In 1632 he removed to London, where he became vicar of Saint Stephen's (in Coleman Street). Despite his well-known sympathy with Congregational principles, he was not seriously molested by Laud and Juxon, who admired the liberalism and the great gifts of the man. Even before the convention of the Long Parliament, he was regarded as one of the greatest preachers in the capital and was respected for his theological learning and his remarkable dialectical ability. He was a master of the polemical style and, as Haller has well said, remained convinced that every problem could be solved by free discussion.[1] In his sermons Goodwin abandoned the highly analytical style of his clerical colleagues for the pithy, excursive, and frankly persuasive technique which was to prove so important in the moulding of liberal opinion in London during the critical days of the Civil War.

Since the early days of his London ministry the great preacher's orthodoxy had not been above suspicion. Goodwin was possessed of a fearless and exploratory intelligence which roamed restlessly across the face of all divine knowledge. In 1640, his *Saints Interest* displayed a radical theological bent which resulted in an unjust charge that he was at the point of embracing Socinian teachings. He continued his speculations in the *Impedit Ira* (1641) and in the *Imputatio Fidei* (1642), which evidence the profound influence that Dutch Arminianism exerted at this early date on the direction which his doctrinal thought was ultimately to take.[2] Even in 1642 it would be incorrect to regard Goodwin as a Congregationalist in doctrine,[3] though he had by this time embraced Independency with a tenacious zeal inspired wholly by his hatred of Presbyterian bigotry and by his intense devotion to the principles of religious liberty.[4] He was far from content with the moderate and tentative position assumed by his more cautious colleagues in the Assembly and was shortly to grasp the intellectual leadership of a great movement which brought both the sects and powerful sections of lay thought under the banner of Independency. Goodwin remained an Independent until the menace of an exclusive Presbyterian Establishment had been dissipated. When this great gain had been achieved his thought, with respect both to doctrine and to religious toleration, progressed far beyond the Independent position which Cromwell was to consolidate. In one sense it can be maintained that Goodwin prepared English opinion for the masterful hand of the Lord Protector. After 1650 Goodwin was writing not for the present but for the future. There is more than a little justice in Calamy's epigram, "He was indeed a man by himself; 'his hand was against every man, and almost every man's hand against him.' "[1] His restless spirit moved far beyond the van of the traditional thought of his generation.

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[1] Haller, *Tracts on Liberty*, I, 19.

[2] It may be well at this point to observe that we have sought to distinguish carefully between Anglo-Catholicism (English Arminianism) and true Arminian thought. (*Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 115–117.)

[3] Ruffini, Francesco, *Religious Liberty* (L. and N.Y., 1912), 165–166.

[4] Jackson, Thomas, *The Life of John Goodwin, etc.* (L., 1872), 59–60.

During the critical years 1643–1646, Goodwin assailed the Presbyterian pretensions in a prolific swarm of pamphlets and books marked by bitter irony, ridicule, and occasional scurrility, but imbued withal with an unswerving devotion to religious liberty. During this period he bore the brunt of the literary battle almost alone, since his more cautious colleagues, dismayed by the hydra of sectarianism, followed but slowly into the unplotted course where Goodwin's bold intelligence was steadily guiding Independency. Baylie wrote in 1644 that he was the most dangerous enemy of presbytery and pointed out that the great Independent was already prepared to demand "a full liberty of conscience to all sects, even Turks, Jews, Papists. . . . "[2] His church in Coleman Street was a centre of advanced thought. Goodwin preached with zest and effectiveness, bringing to the pulpit "a clear head, a fluent tongue, a penetrating spirit, and a marvelous faculty in discanting on scriptures." He was a formidable theological opponent, having at his command a quick and encyclopaedic knowledge of the scriptures and a rare ability to wring new meaning from old and conventional texts, which not infrequently trapped unwary antagonists. He was, in short, the most dangerous of all the enemies of Presbyterian intolerance.[3]

Goodwin was deprived of his charge in 1645 because of his unorthodox doctrinal views. But he was by no means silenced by this action. He took many of his old parishioners with him to erect an Independent Church in Coleman Street, where he became even more renowned as a preacher and controversialist. Shortly after this date he progressed rapidly in the formulation of his philosophy of toleration and in the clarification of his own doctrinal position. He attacked Cromwell's settlement of religion with quite as much vigour as he had bestowed upon his Presbyterian enemies in the earlier period, though upon narrower grounds. In this later phase his views on the subject of religious toleration were to gain maturity and to achieve some measure of systematization.

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[1] Calamy, Edmund, *The Nonconformists Memorial, etc.* (L., 1775), I, 151.

[2] Baylie, *Letters and Journals*, II, 181.

[3] This view was shared by Baylie and Edwards. When in 1646 Goodwin attacked the ordinance against heresies and blasphemies in his *Some Modest and Humble Queries*, Edwards wrote concerning the author of these *Queries*, "I may say as the Holy Ghost doth of Herods imprisoning John, 'He hath added yet this above all,' to write such a wicked pamphlet, and at such a time, there being not a more desperate ungodly, atheistical peece written by any man since the Reformation." Edwards reminded his readers that in the second part of the *Gangraena* "I feared if hee lived but one seven years, hee would prove as arch an heretick, and as dangerous a man as ever England bred." (*Gangraena*, iii, 117–118.)

a. Goodwin's early thought, 1640–*c.*1646

Though Goodwin wrote with clarity and coherence his thought is difficult to appraise critically. He was a voluminous writer and addressed himself to the problem or controversy of the day. The student has therefore to form a synthesis of his ideas from scattered sources, bearing in mind that the exigencies of the moment not infrequently led Goodwin to overemphasize an idea in order to reap a particular advantage. A further difficulty arises from the fact that Goodwin's thought was elastic and organic, proceeding steadily towards a liberal and almost sceptical conclusion.

Goodwin possessed a remarkable ability to treat a time-worn topic with fresh enthusiasm and to break the shackles which convention and historical tradition had imposed upon its treatment. This faculty is to be observed in his discussion of the power of the magistrate in the Christian Church. The State, Goodwin argued, derives its existence from needs and origins that bear no relation whatever to religion. The State requires no warrant from religion in order to gain validity for its existence; it is vested with no spiritual sanction. Men are members of the State as men and not as Christians, while the State gains no increment of power from the fact of its Christianity.[1] When, therefore, it claims the right to persecute it invokes the sanction of civil power in issues not intrinsic to its nature. Persecution rests upon precisely identical sanctions, whether it be carried out by a Christian or by a heathen State. The magistrate may, if he be Christian, provide for the peace and security of the Church by wise civil ordinances. But he cannot claim as a right of magistracy the sanctions of persecution in order to enforce a particular religion upon his people.[1] For the State derives its power exclusively from the law of nature, and even here its authority is limited to that which is necessary and beneficent to its members. Whatever power the magistrate assumes in religion is arrogated and tyrannous since Christianity rests upon foundations wholly dissimilar and unrelated to the sources of his authority.

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[1] Freund, Michael, *Die Idee der Toleranz im England der grossen Revolution* (Halle-Saale, 1927), 216–217.

Infinite confusion and grave injury to religion have resulted from the view that the Christian ruler can and should be invested with power in spiritual causes. The Church will thrive better under the rule of a heathen magistrate than under the sway of a godly prince if the latter has been sanctioned in the employment of the sword of persecution. There are no infallible criteria whereby the ruler can determine the true and the false in religion. God reveals His truth gradually and usually to only a minority of His saints. It has often happened that the ruler moved by the zeal of orthodoxy has sought to stamp out the minority most inspired by God's spirit.[2] And if it should so happen that the ruler sought to compel men to embrace the true faith, his compulsive means could do no more than invite men to perjury and hypocrisy. The doctrine of persecution displays a misunderstanding of human nature and a violent disregard of the stability of the civil State. Those men who are irreligious or indifferent will conform to the ruler's command whether he be godly or ungodly, since they obey only a civil command. But the determined and religious man will not be persuaded by the threat of temporal punishment to endanger his immortal soul.[3] In either case persecution is ineffective: in the first, because compliance has no more than a civil meaning; in the second, because the command of the magistrate will go unheeded.

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[1] Goodwin, John, *Innocencies triumph, or an answer to the . . . discourse lately published by William Prynne, intituled, A full reply, etc.* (L., 1644), 8.

[2] [Goodwin, John], *A reply of two of the brethren to A.S.* [*Adam Steuart*]. *Wherein you have observations on his considerations, annotations, &c. upon the Apologeticall narration. With a plea for liberty of conscience for the apologists church way, etc.* (L., 1644), 60–61. This pamphlet was almost certainly from Goodwin's pen. Baylie wrote, "M.S. against A.S. is John Goodwin of Coleman Street." (*Letters and Journals*, II, 180.) Bartlet, William, *'Ιχνογραφία. Or a model of the primitive congregational way, etc.* (L., 1647), likewise attributed it to him.

[3] [Goodwin], *A reply of two of the brethren to A.S.*, 59.

Goodwin's devotion to religious liberty led him to deny any religious power to the magistrate and to develop a theory which sharply separated the functions of Church and State. In this important connection he was the first significant English thinker to divorce the State completely from any participation in the religious life and discipline of the Church. Religion, he held, is a purely spiritual matter in which the ruler has no concern.[1] When the State declines to interfere in spiritual matters the sphere of its proper activity will be clarified and strengthened. Religious toleration frees the State of dangerous divisions and enables it to exploit the true sources of its power. If toleration had no other virtue to recommend it, the vast benefits which it confers upon the State would alone suffice to confirm it. The civil arm has neither title nor capacity to undertake the prosecution of religious causes, and when it does so it is guilty of a "dangerous medling with Saints."[2] For too long the State has been made the pawn of arrogant men who seek nothing less than the confirmation of their own pride and irascibility. The magistrate should reflect that if it is his duty to punish heresy, it is likewise his duty to determine and define heresy and error.[3]

Obviously neither the civil ruler nor, for that matter, any other human being enjoys the power or the competency to determine infallibly between truth and error. The State enjoys sovereignty over Christians whether it is Christian or pagan solely because its rule is based upon civil administration alone. All forms of the State are equal and indifferent to the Church. To deny this is to hold that religious truth is determined by the mass of the unregenerate in any particular society. This would place the godly, who are few in number, at the perpetual mercy of the mob. To give religious power to the State, which is in the custody of those who are spiritually dead, would be tantamount to attempting to impart a soul to something which never had a soul.[1] The godly comprise a spiritual aristocracy led directly by God who are not, in spiritual concerns, under the sceptre of an earthly power.

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[1] Goodwin cites numerous passages from the fathers and the reformers to sustain this position. Amongst the reformers he mentions his great predecessor Acontius (Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, I, 303–365), whom he calls "a man of much piety and worth, who fled for his conscience, took sanctuary in this kingdom." (Goodwin, *Innocencies triumph*, 12.)

[2] [Goodwin], *A reply of two of the brethren to A.S.*, 44.

[3] *Ibid.*, 52.

The Presbyterians, Goodwin charged, sought to remedy this defect in the magistrate's authority by reducing him to the role of executioner for the clergy. Even they are forced to admit that the ruler cannot judge between truth and error. But what will happen, he enquired, "in case the ministers living under the jurisdiction of the magistrate, (those I mean who are reputed godly, faithfull, and orthodox) shall be divided in judgement among themselves, and one part of them adjudge that for truth and orthodox doctrine, which the other shall condemne for errour and heresie . . . under which of these shadows shall the magistrate repose with peace and safety?"[2] Presumably the magistrate would in this inevitable contingency follow the requirements of the majority, and his first task would be the repression of the minority. A few such divisions of the orthodox would destroy the ministry and the Church completely.[3] The Presbyterian position, and, indeed, the orthodox view generally, endangers the civil State and reduces religious truth to solution by the test of temporal force. Those who press for the civil restraint of error would in the final analysis place the most abstruse and uncertain questions of divinity for ultimate decision in the hands of English juries. Is it conceivable, Goodwin enquired, that any reasonable man can believe that "twelve simple countrimen, such as our ordinary juries usually consist of . . . be of any competent faculty or interest, to passe upon the life or liberty of a studious, learned, and conscientious man . . . which the greatest and ablest professors of divinitie in the world, are not able cleerly, or with any competent satisfaction to the scrupulous . . . to resolve, or determine?"[4]

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[1] Freund, *Die Idee der Toleranz*, 221.

[2] Goodwin, John, *Hagio-mastix, or the scourge of the saints displayed in his colours of ignorance and blood, etc.* (L., 1646), 60.

[3] *Ibid.*, 61.

[4] [Goodwin, John], *Some modest and humble queries concerning a printed paper, intituled, An ordinance presented to the honourable House of Commons, &c. for the preventing of the growing and spreading of heresies, etc.* (L., 1646), 5.

The fact is that those who wrench the scriptures in order to establish the power of the magistrate in the Church are concerned only with the enforcement of their particular opinions on the consciences of other men. They exalt the spiritual authority of the ruler only when they are quite certain that his power will be exercised in their own interests.[1] The "discipline" which these men require at the hands of the State is a persecution calculated to suppress the spread of truth and to dwarf the advancement of our knowledge of God. Our belief thus becomes circumscribed by the accidental opinions of the ruler. The Christian can no longer progress beyond the knowledge of the prince without incurring the danger of "having his bones broken by the iron rod of the civill magistrate, for making profession of anything contrary to that which he professeth."[2]

England stood in danger, Goodwin held, of being broken in the rack which the Presbyterians were erecting in the nation for the trial of conscience. With magnificent invective he charged them with claiming a power satanic in origin and hellish in purpose. They demand a jurisdiction which will clothe the naked arrogance and wilfulness of their design. They entrust their cause not to the mighty weapon of God's truth but to the puny darts with which they would arm the magistrate for the persecution of the godly. They are men who "hope they shall not be distracted about their religion, nor be put upon that sore trouble of seeking it they know not where . . . but shall have it put into their mouths by the hand of authority."[3] They are men who would bring ruin upon religion and discredit and fatal divisions upon the State.

Goodwin treated the subject of the relation of the magistrate to the Church with boldness and refreshing vigour. Discarding completely the historical conception of the relations of the secular and spiritual governments, he defended with logic and an astute appeal to Parliament the thesis that the civil government is a creation and an entity which exists solely for the ordering of secular life. The role of the State has been obscured and its fruition delayed by the spiritual responsibility which ambitious clerics and arrogant factions have foisted on it. It will achieve dignity and stability only when it withdraws wholly from concern with the furtherance and protection of religious truth. God's truth is omnicompetent for its own protection and perpetuation. The State enjoys neither capacity nor competency to determine truth and error, and when it undertakes this function it is prostituted by self-seeking and dangerous fanaticisms. The magistrate best serves the Church of God by permitting truth to prevail by its implicit power in an atmosphere of freedom and thoughtful enquiry. The State is composed of the multitude, of the unregenerate many and the regenerate few, while the Church of Christ is composed only of the godly who have been saved by the attainment of divine truth. The aristocracy of the Church must not be confused with the democracy of the State. In Goodwin's theory the separation of Church and State stood complete.

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[1] [Goodwin], *A reply of two of the brethren to A.S.*, 61.

[2] *Ibid.*, 62.

[3] *Idem.*

Goodwin's contribution to the development of tolerant sentiment in the period of the Civil War was of very great importance. He had advanced a theory of separation of Church and State which appealed to many groups in England as the only satisfactory solution to the impasse which was becoming steadily more ominous. Nor was that all. In the critical years 1644–1646, he attacked without reserve or apology the claim of Presbyterianism to an infallible and exclusive system of religious truth. He was probing here the Achilles' heel of all persecuting systems of religious organization. He cast off completely the Calvinistic restraint of his more conservative Independent colleagues to lay siege to the most vital battery in the bulwarks of ecclesiastical infallibility. He had denied with fine logic the capacity of the magistrate to discriminate between truth and error; he sought now to destroy the spectre of persecution by proving that the historical claims of infallibility and exclusive truth rested upon no other foundations than clerical arrogance and factional ambition. His attack was directed principally against the claims which the Presbyterians were advancing in the Assembly and in Parliament, but the effect of his argument was universal in scope.

The Presbyterians, he indicated, have claimed that the supreme spiritual power in England, and, indeed, the capacity to rule infallibly in matters of faith, is vested in the Assembly of Divines. They have declared the decrees of the Assembly and the will of God to be identical. These divines have arrived at the "beautiful haven of papal infallibility."[1] They have woven divine truth into a fabric which meets their own taste. They have drawn their texts so carefully from the Old Testament that they have in effect almost resentfully denied the right of God to ordain the coming of Christ with the New. The Assembly has bestowed upon itself, without any visible warrant, an infallible power in ordering the religious life of the nation. They have not paused to enquire, "If presbytery be *jure divino*, why not Episcopacie? Why not Independencie?"[2] They are guilty of the unspeakable tyranny of seeking to usurp power over the consciences of their fellow Christians. Goodwin warned England that "once this dore be opened . . . the expositions or interpretations of Scripture, or deductions from Scripture, made by men, shall be made binding upon the judgments and consciences of others, under civil mulcts and penalties in any kind."[3] Once this power has been granted to any group, it can be broken only by the violent uprising of a subjected and persecuted people. England may well be alarmed by the amazing presumption with which the orthodox speak so glibly of truth and error. It is doubtful, indeed, if the Assembly can pronounce with certainty on the difficult questions of the trinity, despite the fire which it has been breathing on this subject.[4] The orthodox pretend to a fulness of knowledge which other Christians have not attained; they lay claim to a certainty which God has denied to "many of His children"; and they apparently intend to punish men to whom God has not seen fit to reveal the infallible knowledge of truth.[5] Thus it is that the Assembly proposes to correct the shortcomings of Almighty God. History has never witnessed a more arrogant or dangerous persuasion.

Presbyterianism has sought to justify the tyranny of its thought and policy by the specious contention that some system of exclusivism and infallibility is necessary in order to restrain the spread of sectarianism. Thus, to prevent one imagined evil, they propose to bind "all conscientious persons in the land in the bundle of high presbytery with the iron coards of fining, imprisoning, banishing, death."[1] They have sought to convince England that all men who question their infallible pretensions deserve punishment at the hands of the magistrate. "Never was this poor ignorant world more abused with a word, then it is at this day with the word, *orthodox*."[2] They have condemned all who disagree with them for the mere fact of disagreement. Thus they contend that the Independents should be extirpated for the heinous crime of seeking the right to worship freely as their consciences prescribe. Presbyterianism has sought to vindicate liberty of conscience for itself by the remarkable expedient of prohibiting all other forms of worship.[3] It has been guilty of an arrogant presumption which neither the civil State nor the Christian conscience can tolerate.

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[1] [Goodwin, John], *Anapologesiates antapologias. Or, the inexcusablenesse of that grand accusation of the brethren, called Antapologia, etc.* (L., 1646), 57.

[2] Goodwin, *Hagio-mastix*, 19.

[3] *Ibid.*, 27.

[4] *Ibid.*, 28–29.

[5] *Ibid.*, 32.

The claims of Presbyterianism to the exclusive definition of Christian life rests upon no higher authority than its own amazing presumption. Orthodoxy can gird its intolerance with no scriptural warrant; Protestant orthodoxy stands condemned by the same texts with which the reformers overthrew Roman infallibility. God has clearly forbidden the oppression of part of His people by any other part.[4] He has commanded the Church to seek unity of faith but has declared that error should be reduced only by exposing it to the "Gospell shining forth" in the Christian ministry.[5] Surely the long arm of the gospel has not been so much shortened that it is now helpless before error. If the Presbyterians possess a fuller and richer knowledge of truth than the other religious groups in England it is their peculiar obligation to lift the weaker to the stronger light of their understanding by gentle and spiritual means, "onely we would not be rack'd or stretch'd to the same stature or proportion with you."[6] Christian unity can be attained only as the light of God's truth is unfolded to the minds and spirits of the weak. Men must be "led into this unity, by the hand of the angel of light, not to be frightened into it by an evill angel of fear and terror."[1] And above all, the Christian Church will refrain from the awful risk of persecuting truth which may well be clothed in the appearance of error. Religious truth cannot be ascertained by the decision of a majority or by the wholly circumstantial fact of power.[2]

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[1] [Goodwin], *Anapologesiates antapologias*, 100.

[2] *Ibid.*, 102.

[3] *Ibid.*, 105.

[4] [Goodwin], *A reply of two of the brethren to A.S.*, 91.

[5] [Goodwin], *Anapologesiates antapologias*, 106.

[6] [Goodwin], *A reply of two of the brethren to A.S.*, 93.

Goodwin heaped scorn and ridicule upon the pretensions of the Presbyterians. They have been guilty of an incredible arrogance which flows from their distorted doctrine of election. Not only have they partially succeeded in erecting Presbyterianism as the State religion but they have invoked a divine authority in judging heresy and error and have commanded the magistrate to execute their will. Yet they can argue no stronger justification for so complete a tyranny than a recent and a precarious tenure of political power. They talk glibly of infallibility while ignoring the fact that they disagree violently amongst themselves both in England and abroad even on important questions of dogma.[3] With no greater title to infallibility they irascibly announce their determination to procure a satanic unity in England by "overawing . . . the judgments and consciences of men through feare of secular molestations," banishments, and death.[4] They entrust the infallible truth which they proclaim not to the light of reason and the Christian weapon of persuasion but to the gibbet of the executioner.

Goodwin subjected the solemn pronouncements of the Assembly and the exclusive pretensions of the Calvinistic State Church to a blast of ridicule and derisive criticism from which it never fully recovered. He was not content to assume a purely defensive position—to argue simply for the right of Independency and sectarianism to exist within the framework of a Presbyterian Establishment. He attacked instead the very foundations of orthodox thought. He denied categorically that any religious communion could define precisely the limits of the truth which God was slowly revealing to His people. Men are saved by their personal grace, not by the formularies of the Church. Presbyterian intolerance, he declared, threatened the peace and dignity of the Church, raised once more in

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[1] [Goodwin], *A reply of two of the brethren to A.S.*, 99.

[2] *Ibid.*, 102–104.

[3] [Goodwin], *Anapologesiates antapologias*, 119.

[4] *Ibid.*, 118.

England the awful spectre of persecution, and paralysed the means with which God has endowed men for the attainment of saving faith.

The denial of the right of coercion to both the Church and the magistrate removed, in Goodwin's theory, the possibility of religious persecution. By this means he had established at least the negative necessity for religious toleration in the Christian State. Goodwin based this contention upon the almost sceptical argument that truth cannot be infallibly or precisely determined by human wisdom. We are restrained from the act of persecution by the knowledge that it is impossible to prove any opinion heretical and by the realization that we incur the awful risk of fighting against God. When God's will and truth are clear, men instinctively and rationally embrace sound doctrine. But when doctrine is veiled with obscurity and controversy we can do no more than rest content in the knowledge that God will reveal His will further in due season. Consequently any man who seeks by force to suppress a doctrine or practice held as an article of faith by other Christians can never be certain that he does not fight against God Himself.[1] In every doctrine which is from God there is something of the essence of God. Any man, therefore, would be insane who would persecute any teaching unless he had "proof upon proof, demonstration upon demonstration, evidence upon evidence," that such a teaching was not from God.[2] And it is patent that we cannot attain such certainty of evidence. We may be sure that God remains competent to punish and avenge error, and we must rest content in that assurance. We cannot risk the persecution of what our fallible knowledge persuades us is error. "It were no lesse than an exaltation of folly in any man, to expose his own life to the stroke of justice, by assaulting the life of a malefactor whilst he is going to execution."[3]

Religious truth cannot be attained by accepting the prescriptions of bigotry. England is now engaged in a dangerous dispute concerning the precise content of divine truth. Perspective has been lost and bigotry seeks insectile knowledge where only division exists. The Presbyterians would ignore the fact that never before in Christian history have there been so many sects and opinions. Indeed, their own communion is divided into six or seven fragments. These divisions amongst pious men reveal that truth is uncertainly known and confirm the view that fulness of truth is required of no man.[1] Few, if any, heresies are really damnable since Christ has promised salvation to all who seek Him and believe on Him.[2] We cannot prescribe where God has not prescribed and any attempt to do so results in hopeless confusion and tyranny. This is clearly demonstrated in the ordinance against heresies which has been passed as a sop to Presbyterian bigotry.[3] They have demanded extreme penalties for spiritual offences when any sane man would admit that no court of judgment can infallibly determine what is and what is not heresy.[4] It is evidently better for men to refrain from violence and dispute until God has chosen to make the way a little clearer to all pious and worthy men. Above all, we have no licence to lay waste the social and religious societies in order to fulfil the requirements of a particular theory of truth questioned by so many conscientious men. The essence of truth and the fabric of charity are too fragile to be submitted to the arrogance of sectarian pretension. Christian dissension has blurred our eyes to the fact that all Christians are united in the essentials of faith.[5]

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[1] Goodwin, John, θεομαχία; *or the grand imprudence of men running the hazard of fighting against God, in suppressing any way, doctrine, or practice, concerning which they know not certainly whether it be from God or no, etc.* (L., 1644), 15.

[2] *Ibid.*, 18.

[3] *Ibid.*, 20.

The denial of the view that religious truth could be exactly determined appeared to the conservative seventeenth-century mind as a dissolvent which would destroy organized religion and which would weaken mortally the cement of the civil society. It was this conviction that gave Presbyterianism so large a prestige in England in the period of the Civil Wars. The certainty and discipline which it promised constituted the only apparent insurance against the disintegration of England into irreconcilable spiritual particles. But Goodwin had spoken in behalf of an ever enlarging opinion which argued with logic and fact that the scriptures gave no warrant to exclusive religious systems and that history had amply proved them dangerous to both the Church and State. Goodwin had progressed so far that he denied even the possibility of defining absolutely the body of divine truth. We have previously observed that a very important stream of thought had arisen in seventeenth-century England which embraced this position upon rational or sceptical grounds. It is important to notice that Goodwin's devotion to this principle was derived from somewhat different sources. His thought developed to its logical limits the intense individualism of the sectarian philosophy. Salvation is the concern of every man, and each human being must attain it by the resources with which God has endowed him. The search for truth implies a faith in Christ of itself efficient for salvation. Men will vary in their spiritual quite as much as in their physical statures, but God has demanded no more of any man than his capacities permit.

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[1] Goodwin, *Hagio-mastix*, 71.

[2] *Ibid.*, 84–85.

[3] [Goodwin], *Some modest and humble queries*, 9; *Hagio-mastix*, 32 ff.

[4] [Goodwin], *Some modest and humble queries*, 9–11. "The Scriptures not having cleerly determined or defined, what is erroneous, or hereticall, in many (if not in the most) of the particulars mentioned in the said ordinance; who, or of what capacity or interest ought they to be, that are meet to be constituted judges or determiners of such cases and questions? whether those, that already are profoundly ingaged on the one hand? or those who as yet stand undeclared in either? Or who have any power or authority from God to appoint judges in such cases as they please?" (*Ibid.*, 12.)

[5] This loss of true perspective reminded Goodwin of an example in natural history: "The irregularity of the mountains and valleys in the surface of the earth, troubles no man's opinion concerning the perfect roundnesse of it, because it is swallowed up into victory by the vastness of the globe." (Goodwin, *θεομαχία*, 23.)

The subjective search for truth, then, is a necessary responsibility of every man. We cannot risk our souls upon the arbitrary prescription of a clerical authority which is itself demonstrably fallible. Salvation can be gained, religious truth discovered, only under conditions of freedom and tolerance. Bigotry and persecution are fatal to religious life. Intolerant ecclesiastical authority says "(in effect) unto the holy Ghost, reveale nothing more unto others, then thou hast revealed unto us; or rather thus; if thou hast not revealed the truth unto us, reveale it not unto any other men."[1] Religious authority seeks to formalize and solidify a spiritual process which is evolutionary in its nature. It presumes with hideous error that the Church can be perfected by the agencies of compulsion—by exacting "obedience and subjection from those, to whom it hath not effectually taught or persuaded obedience and subjection."[1] The true reformation must be tolerant of the weaknesses and consciences of all men. It will be governed by the conviction that truth can be found and maintained only in an atmosphere of free discussion. It will presume that men can be won to true faith only when they shall be "freely permitted, without feare or danger of molestation, to consult the Apostles . . . of what religion it were best for them to be."[2] Religion flourishes and knowledge of truth expands when the Church is a "tender and nursing mother unto all, not a bloody and cruel step-mother" to any who seek faith and peace. Men cannot evade the personal responsibility upon which their salvation depends; they cannot discharge it wholesale by synods, councils, and authority "for ease and cheapness sake."[3] Complete freedom must prevail and men must water the vine of their own faith.

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[1] [Goodwin], *Some modest and humble queries*, 2.

The liberty which is so essential to the vitality and advancement of religion will, indeed, have the ultimate effect of winning men to a unity of belief. The Church will realize that honest error is in itself an important step towards the attainment of truth.[4] For men who hold even serious errors in doctrine "may yet be as full of grace and goodnesse, as precious in the sight of God, as fruitfull in every good worke, as serviceable to the state, and commonwealth" as those whose beliefs are regarded as wholly orthodox.[5] Those men who explore beyond the fringes of orthodoxy not infrequently vastly extend the limits of our knowledge. Moreover, even when they err seriously, they may be won by persuasion and sound teaching, so long as we do not advance to meet them with the whip of coercion. Goodwin displayed complete confidence in the power of truth and rational persuasion. He argued that if repression could only be renounced, the godly ministers could then deal effectively with error which now lurks in the dark corners into which persecution has driven it.[6] England can never gain civil harmony or spiritual health until faction gives way to a catholic charity. This is the way of true reformation, and "that way which shall be able to out-reason, not that which shall out-clubbe, all other wayes, will at last exalt unitie, and be it selfe exalted by gathering in all other wayes unto it."[1] The reformation towards which England has striven through so many vicissitudes will be at last achieved when truth and conscience are liberated by a toleration which permits every man to explore without molestation the mystery of God's will and to worship Him as his conscience dictates. In this reformation men will acquire dignity and nobility, the Church will gain vigour and breadth of vision, and the secular State will at last be freed of the hideous responsibility of safeguarding and implementing bigotry by the persecution of resolved and pious consciences.

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[1] Goodwin, John, *Twelve considerable serious cautions, very necessary to be observed, in . . . reformation according to the Word of God, etc.* (L., 1646), 5.

[2] [Goodwin], *A reply of two of the brethren to A.S.*, 33–34.

[3] *Ibid.*, 34; *Twelve considerable serious cautions*, 6.

[4] [Goodwin], *Some modest and humble queries*, 3.

[5] *Ibid.*, 4.

[6] Masson, *Life of John Milton*, III, 121–122.

Goodwin's defence of the doctrine of religious toleration was broadly conceived and complete. The dangers which he detected in Presbyterian orthodoxy caused him to deal most exhaustively with the sources of intolerance in order to forestall the erection of a rigid National Church which would have as its first aim the extirpation of the ferment of sectarian life in England. On the one hand, he was concerned with cutting away the foundations upon which the institutions of persecution had so long rested; on the other, with giving to religious toleration an adequate defence both as a religious right and as a civil necessity. His detailed and eloquent denial that heresy and error could be healed or exterminated by coercive weapons contributed importantly to both of these ends.

The doctrine of persecution endangers the very existence of Christian life. When an exclusive orthodoxy has grasped the reins of power it seeks above all else to perpetuate its tyrannous existence. Heresy becomes synonymous with the criticism or questioning of its teachings or sovereignty.[2] Such an orthodoxy wields a repressive and irreligious power in arrogating to itself the determination of the limits of truth and error. It places the lives and liberties of Christian men at the mercy of its judgments, inspired, we may believe, by the desperate resolution to beat down its enemies.[3] Heresy, consequently, is conceived by orthodoxy as nothing more than the criticism of its power. True heresy may flourish without molestation so long as it does not assail the prerogatives of orthodoxy. This presumptuous temper has been well demonstrated in England by the recent ordinance against heresies and blasphemies. We have only the solemn disavowal of fallible men that they do not intend under this statute to persecute what may well "be the sacred truths of God."[1] As its first action the Presbyterian State Church has demanded sanctions which will enable it to compel men to preach and believe only what it declares to be true. The Church has resolved to defend religious truth by slaying men arbitrarily declared to be its enemies. This determination reveals the true character of Presbyterianism: it has grasped the weapons that have ever been employed by idolatrous faiths; it has founded its rule in England upon violence and unchristian coercion.[2]

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[1] Goodwin, *θεομαχία*, 30.

[2] Goodwin, *Hagio-mastix*, 1.

[3] *Ibid.*, 15.

Persecuting faiths have never been able to adduce scriptural or reasonable defence for the exploitation and subjection of the human conscience. The fact that the Presbyterians have buttressed their tyrannous discipline upon carefully selected texts from the Old Testament is a tacit admission that these claims cannot be sustained in the New. They have been neither logical nor honest. The Old Testament ordinances for putting false prophets to death are clearly no longer applicable. The orthodox have endeavoured to erect a Jewish commonwealth in England, forgetting that God led the Jewish nation directly and on occasion declared His will clearly and infallibly to it.[3] The orthodox have chosen to ignore the fact that under the rule of the gospel there are no adequate grounds in scripture upon which "to build the lawfulness of any compulsory proceedings by way of civill penaltie, whether death, or other, against persons deemed erroneous."[4] Persecution has been grounded in arguments which are not relevant to a Christian society and by a coercive power which does violence to the very nature of the Church of Christ. For the Church has neither sanctions nor competency for the violation of conscience. Under the gospel "the best oracles that magistrates and judges have to direct them in doubtful cases about matters of religion, are men of very fallible judgements. . . . " Those who persecute proceed blindly and without authority in an area which God has expressly reserved to His own judgment.[1]

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[1] [Goodwin], *Some modest and humble queries*, 1.

[2] *Ibid.*, 2.

[3] Goodwin, *Hagio-mastix*, 46.

[4] Goodwin, John, *A post-script, or appendix to a treatise lately published by authority intituled Hagio-mastix* (L., [1646]), 28.

It is deplorable that the passions of the orthodox against heresy and error should exceed the temperate charity of Christ towards those whom He infallibly knew to be lost. If Christ had desired the extirpation of error by violent and coercive means, it is incredible that He would not have provided us with some clear and certain rule for determining what error is and with an unquestionable command to proceed against it.[2] He withheld this power and responsibility from both the Christian and the heathen magistrate. And the wisdom of this restraint is obvious, for if the ruler had been so charged the world would inevitably have been destroyed.[3] We should be deterred in bloody courses by these reflections. When men undertake the destruction of the true faith by coercive means they are guilty of heathenish idolatry; when they seek the extirpation of what they regard as false religion they do so without reason and without warrant.[4] No orthodoxy, however depraved, has ever deliberately undertaken the persecution of what it knew to be truth. Truth and error have been indiscriminately ravaged in the long and bloody history of the successive attempts of self-appointed orthodoxies to shackle the human spirit and to impose an impious authority upon the Christian Church.

Since the Reformation a powerful Christian sentiment has been developing in protest against the grave iniquity and harmful consequences of the doctrine of persecution. The triumph of religious toleration has been delayed by the survival in each sect of the notion of infallibility and the desire of each communion to gain mastery by the destruction of its rivals. But the number of sects has been so enlarged and their rancour has so increased that religious toleration has become not only an evident good but necessary for the preservation of Christian and civil life. Coercion has played its role to its inevitable end.

[1] Goodwin, *Hagio-mastix*, 47.

[2] Goodwin, *A post-script*, 12.

[3] Goodwin, *Hagio-mastix*, 51.

[4] *Ibid.*, 56.

England, so Goodwin suggested, had now to choose between the dangerous and insupportable pretensions of Presbyterian orthodoxy and a spiritual order which would grant every communion the right to exist and worship so long as civil order was not contravened. The latter solution was, he held, dictated not only by positive Christian principles but by stark necessity. Independency offered the only solution to the religious problems which so harassed the Commonwealth, and if logically extended it would in time resolve the differences which so distracted the godly in England by settling them in the arena of free discussion and enquiry.

The existence of heresy and error can be neither ignored nor denied. And Goodwin regarded both with quite as much horror as did the orthodox. But the coercive Church seeks to destroy error by weapons which are both forbidden and without efficacy. Error, Goodwin would maintain, can be healed only by the sword of the spirit, which Christ has declared to be the sole weapon of the godly. The Church must be zealous against error; it must seek its cure by preaching, persuasion, and charity, and, if all else fails, must drive it from the Church by the penalty of excommunication. This is the limit of the penalties which may be laid against the heretic. Heresy has made large gains in England only because we have rejected "the wisdome and counsell of God for the opposing and suppressing of them, and have recourse to our owne arm, hoping by disgracing, displacing, way-laying, impoverishing . . . imprisoning, and other weapons and ways of the flesh, to ease ourselves of the burthensomnesse and trouble of them."[1] But these violent weapons are not those of Christ's ministers.[2] Christ has left His followers fully armed against heresy, and when the Church invokes the sword of the civil ruler it shatters the one weapon competent to destroy it.

God has ordained that men must be given opportunity to see their errors and to repent of them. Men cannot be herded or forced into the knowledge which ensures salvation. The reception of truth is a special gift of God which no man can attain by his own will, much less by another's will. It is unreasonable to punish a man for his failure to attain a knowledge which can be granted to him only by God.[1] God has sought to insulate and isolate every human soul in order that it may freely and by its own resources find His way without the rude intervention of ulterior influences. "And whosoever shall limit or straiten the providence of God, in this kind, by any hasty or violent taking away a soul from under the influence and working of any ordinance of Christ appointed for his salvation, before the blessed work of repentance be accomplished in him, will be arraigned before the tribunall of the living God, as accessarie to the blood of that soul. . . ."[2] Such an heretic constitutes no danger to Christians, who are protected both by the subjective certainty of their faith and by the power of the Church to excommunicate those in error. At the same time, the heretic remains constantly under the tuition of the godly and the untrammelled guidance of his own mind and conscience. Above all, when charity prevails he is deprived of the crown of martyrdom which immortalizes error by lending it dignity, reputation, and nobility.

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[1] [Goodwin], *A reply of two of the brethren to A.S.*, 57.

[2] Goodwin, *θεομαχία*, 34.

Goodwin had focused the attention of thoughtful men in England upon the fundamental question raised by the intention of the Assembly, with the apparent approval of Parliament, to erect in England an exclusive religious establishment. He had dealt at length with the problem of persecution and had demonstrated that it threatened the solidity of the State and the vitality of religion. Religious coercion enjoys no scriptural warrant; it is undertaken against the example of Christ and is employed despite His express command. Christ has appointed spiritual weapons for the defence and advancement of His Church. Every man must be granted complete liberty in his quest for truth, and the Church fulfils its deepest obligation when it protects him in that search. Religious life in England has been brought to the verge of disintegration by the attempt to perpetuate an impious principle in the face of countless sects which will not be coerced. The choice which confronts the nation is serious and vital. England must choose between religious toleration and an exclusive and bigoted ecclesiastical

[1] [Goodwin], *A reply of two of the brethren to A.S.*, 58.

[2] Goodwin, *θεομαχία*, 35–36.

settlement which can have no other consequence than confusion, suffering, and violence.

Having dealt carefully with the iniquity of religious persecution and having demonstrated that no earthly power possessed a warrant for the coercion of conscience, Goodwin endeavoured to convince his generation that a broadly conceived religious liberty could alone fulfil the requirements of religious life and civil order. In this early period he sought to frame a system of toleration based squarely upon Independency, and his thought was accordingly not as advanced as was his later theory. Thus it is apparent that he was considerably influenced by the generally entertained Independent view that the limits of toleration should not be extended beyond the fundamentals of faith, by which was meant those sects stemming from historical Protestantism. But, nevertheless, the ultimate liberality of his thought is found reflected in the fact that he had already destroyed the possibility of persecuting the sects which should not enjoy religious liberty.

Men may not be restrained for opinions held honestly and conscientiously, even if they are in error. The Bible affords no example of persecution of conscience, and history has demonstrated its complete futility.[1] England is even now "legally . . . up in arms" to vindicate the principle that persecution will never again be undertaken within her borders. At the same time, the Independents, who have so far advanced that cause, do not avow the open toleration of all manner of heresies.[2] Those groups which attack the fundamentals of faith, such as the Jews, Socinians, and Papists, cannot be permitted freedom of preaching in a Christian Commonwealth,[3] though we must not seek the destruction of these errors by the violent agencies of persecution.[4] Heresy will yield only to the preaching of the pure Word of God and can be subdued by its power alone. Licentious actions and indecent conduct, however, are not excused by the plea of conscience. Anti-social conduct violates the civil order and hence falls squarely under the rightful control of the magistracy even if the offenders argue conscience in explanation of their action.[1] But religious error must be dealt with by the spiritual weapons with which the godly are invested.

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[1] [Goodwin], *A reply of two of the brethren to A.S.*, 23–24.

[2] [Goodwin], *Anapologesiates antapologias*, Pref.

[3] [Goodwin], *A reply of two of the brethren to A.S.*, 24–25.

[4] *Ibid.*, 25.

The rule of tolerance and liberty in the religious life of the nation will not result in the neglect of heresy. It will rather powerfully implement the Church for its correction. In fact, heresy has in the past been hardened and crystallized by the very violence of the restraint which has been laid upon it. We should reflect that good men will not knowingly embrace evil opinions regardless of the dictates of authority, while the most stringent persecution is powerless to restrain evil men from accepting error. When liberty prevails in England heresy will be compelled to face squarely the overwhelming weight of truth. The State will be strengthened because faction and violence will disappear, while the Church will be freed from the inquisition over consciences.[2] As in Holland, peace will prevail because no religious group can hope to gain exclusive power. "When Christian states, and men of soundest judgment, greatest learning, parts and abilities . . . shal give free liberty to men look'd upon as opposite in judgment to the truth, to publish and openly declare the grounds and reasons of their judgments . . . and not compell them either to keep them burning or glowing in their own breasts, or else to propagate and vent them privately . . . this is another hopefull signe that the days of a generall accommodation in matters of religion, are comming upon the world."[3] The demand for such a toleration is irresistible because it flows from an instinct as deeply seated as the urge to preserve life itself. In England that demand is particularly resolute because the nation has realized how much it has to fear from the intolerance of the Presbyterians. They demand an authority with which "to order the judgments and consciences of men as they please," and would make the civil magistrate the executioner of their policy. England must destroy this danger forever, establishing a true reformation which will strike the yoke of spiritual and physical tyranny from the necks of the saints.[4]

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[1] We somewhat amplify Goodwin's remarks on this point.

[2] [Goodwin], *Anapologesiates antapologias*, 113–115.

[3] [Goodwin], *A reply of two of the brethren to A.S.*, 35.

[4] [Goodwin], *Anapologesiates antapologias*, 148–149.

Congregationalism made its logical and ultimate contribution to the development of religious toleration in Goodwin's early thought. He seized upon the Congregational conception of the Church as the keystone of his defence of religious liberty. The Church is composed of a body of saints who have experienced personal redemption and who are bound directly to the leadership of God. The godly are few in number and are sharply to be distinguished from the mass of the unregenerate.[1] The unsaved are either incapable or unprepared for the Independent way, and Independency desires spiritual jurisdiction over none that are not of the regenerate. "It disdaignes so far to undervalue its beautie and lovelinesse, as to ravish or force the conscience of any man."[2] The Church of Christ gains nothing in persuasive power when it arms itself with the weapons of force.[3] When it avails itself of temporal arms it succeeds only in filling the ranks of the saints with hypocrites and dissemblers. Its mission can be fulfilled only when it utilizes the manifold weapons of the spirit for the salvation of those who are lost in error.[4] The true Church, then, can be neither erected nor maintained by the instruments of compulsion. Goodwin's theory was purely sectarian; the very idea of a National Church was to him a violation of the nature of faith and of ecclesiastical organization. The Lamb of Christ must be separated from the wolves of the world. The sinful of the world must be left to their own fate,[5] and above all else the Church should not violate its own nature and the bounds of its charity by driving the lost into the sanctuary of the godly. Men must be permitted to find God in their own manner.

Nor can it be argued that heresy must be extirpated in order to protect the saints from the possibility of infection. This view betokens a complete misunderstanding of the nature of regeneration. It is an impious libel to assume that men who have attained a knowledge of God's truth can possibly yield to the blandishments of error. When men have been converted they are bound to God by many and intimate ties that cannot be so easily dissolved.[1] The saints are set apart from the world and are insulated from the assaults of heresy and error by the immediacy of their relations with God. The Church will be guided by the knowledge that "God never took any pleasure to cumber his arme with flesh and bloud, when he meant to doe any great thing for his church by it."[2] His Church needs no other assistance than His hand and no other knowledge than His truth. It does not require the counsel of assemblies and synods that in their arrogance seek to force their dicta upon the consciences of men.[3] Nor does it require the guidance of parliaments, elected to administer the civil life, that may seek "to enact laws and statutes in matters of religion, and to order under mulcts and penalties, how men shall worship and serve God . . . a greater power than ever Jesus Christ Himself had, at least then ever he exercised."[4]

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[1] Goodwin, θεομαχία, 23–25.

[2] G., J., [i.e. Goodwin, John], *Innocency and truth triumphing together, etc.* (L., 1644), 26.

[3] *Ibid.*, 27–28.

[4] Goodwin, θεομαχία, 38–39.

[5] Goodwin, *A post-script*, 15.

Goodwin had, at the conclusion of the first Civil War, developed in the full glare of controversy a systematic and reasoned doctrine of religious toleration which contributed not unimportantly to the rapid formulation of Independent theory on this important question in the critical months that intervened before the erection of the Commonwealth. The great controversialist had met the Presbyterians on their own ground and without the slightest disposition to compromise had denied the very basis of their theory. He had differentiated carefully and sharply between the civil society and the religious fabric of the nation. The magistrate was excluded in his thought from any right and any necessity to intervene in religious affairs at the behest of orthodoxy. At the same time, by careful and reiterated consideration, Goodwin had subjected the entire philosophy of religious coercion to devastating criticism. Religious error is, not infrequently, a stage on the way towards truth, and truth can be gained only in an atmosphere of complete tolerance. The individualism implicit in Goodwin's thought is almost anarchistic in its completeness. The Church of God is composed of the saints who have attained the fulness of truth. Neither the Church nor the State can make Christians or punish error, and when they attempt to do so they thwart the workings of God's will. Goodwin paralysed the nerve centres of the persecuting philosophy by a logic, drawn from both Calvinistic and sectarian sources, which stressed at once the spotless character which the Church achieves by its insulation against the sinful mass of the world and the freedom so necessary if the individual is to attain fulness of knowledge.

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[1] Goodwin, *θεομαχία*, 42.

[2] *Ibid.*, 45.

[3] *Ibid.*, 47.

[4] *Ibid.*, 50.

It should be said, however, that Goodwin's earlier thought failed to deal adequately with several issues of grave importance. He displays almost contempt for the radical and eccentric sects of this period whose origins were not Calvinistic. He regarded the Roman Catholics with bitter suspicion, and he would apparently decline to tolerate non-Christian groups. His theory does not consider with precision the attitude which the State is to assume towards these types of extreme dissent. Goodwin's view was in this period essentially sectarian. He suggested, in fine, that the Church had nothing to fear from error since it was immunized against it by the immediacy of the relation of the saint to God and by the antiseptic of excommunication.

Nor was Goodwin's early thought wholly satisfactory in still another area. He achieved a tolerant theory by a logical, if somewhat dour, extension of the Calvinistic doctrine of election. Doctrinally, his position can be reduced to the argument that the godly are best protected and the Church most richly endowed when religious toleration prevails. He displayed but slight concern with the disposition which is to be made of the ungodly. He did not in this period emphasize the latitudinarian argument that the bounds of the Church are very broad indeed, that the essentials of Christianity are few in number and widely held, and that all men who seek Christ earnestly are in the way of salvation. In other words, Goodwin's formal thought was before 1646 reasonably conservative in spirit and substance. In his later writings there is to be observed a remarkable liberalization and fruition of his doctrinal position accompanied by the extension and completion of his great contribution to the development of the theory of religious toleration.

b. Goodwin's later thought, 1647–1660

Until about 1647, John Goodwin waged as an Independent a ceaseless warfare upon intolerance and the exclusive pretensions of Presbyterian orthodoxy. But just as Independent theory was acquiring solidity and support on the basis of religious toleration, Goodwin threw off the somewhat tattered mantle of Calvinistic respectability to explore heroically the vast seas of doctrinal heterodoxy. There is reason for believing that the extremely radical course which his enquiring mind now took was in large part inspired by his almost fanatical desire to enlarge the foundations of the somewhat limited theory of toleration which he had earlier advanced. In his later life Goodwin was able to boast with truth that for almost forty years he had been trying with an unprejudiced spirit all doctrines and all ways.[1] His ultimate theological position was a strange amalgam of Arminian and sceptical influences which placed him outside the bounds of any sect of his day; the staunch individualism which he had always defended so warmly became implicit in his character and theory. In all of his theological speculations and musings in this later period the consideration of the problem of toleration looms large as a conditioning influence upon the development of his thought.

Goodwin proceeded gradually from Calvinistic orthodoxy to an essentially Arminian position. In his early career he retained a firm but troubled devotion to the doctrine of predestination and the numerous doctrinal consequences which flow from it.[2] But as his thought matured he found it quite impossible to reconcile the harshness and rigidity of this dogmatic principle with the spirit and the message of Christ. He "found it ever and anon gravellish in my mouth, and corroding and fretting in my bowels."[3] The struggle which ensued in Goodwin's mind is strikingly reminiscent of that experienced a generation earlier by the liberal thinkers in Holland,[4] and the issue was to be the same. For years he was constrained to adjust his thought to the doctrine because it was so generally entertained by pious and learned men and because its renunciation would destroy the very foundations of his thought and influence. But in time his dissatisfaction became intolerable and he resolved to subject the dogma to the light of reason and to the infallible acid of the scriptures.[1] This examination disclosed not only that there was no scriptural foundation for predestination but that it was essentially destructive to the spirit of Christ's ministry and teachings. The void thus created in Goodwin's thought by the summary rejection of predestination was filled between 1645 and 1648 by the acceptance of the Arminian philosophy with all of the tolerant implications so intimately associated therewith.

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[1] Goodwin, John, *A fresh discovery of the high-Presbyterian spirit, etc.* (L., 1655), 55–56; *Anapologesiates antapologias*, Pref.

[2] Jackson, *Life of John Goodwin*, 147.

[3] Goodwin, John, *Redemption redeemed* (L., 1651), Pref.

[4] *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration*, II, 319–349.

In 1647, Goodwin argued in the *Divine authority of the scriptures asserted* that predestination had shackled the human mind and had narrowed the free grace of Christ. The doctrine and the illiberal temper which was bound with it rested upon a mistaken idolatry of the literal word of the scriptures. The Bible must be regarded as a vast storehouse of truth from which the individual reason may gain knowledge; it possesses validity only in the light of individual interpretation. The foundations of Christianity are to be discovered in the substance and spirit of Christ's teachings rather than in the literal and occasionally vague sentiments of Holy Writ.[2] Men have centred their devotion on the belabouring of texts and have lost the perspective and the reasonable mien which alone enable them to absorb the saving essence of Christ's message.

Goodwin went considerably beyond the early Arminian thinkers in his denial of the doctrine of predestination, evolving an almost unlimited doctrine of general redemption. Salvation is achieved not by the arbitrary choice of God, but within broad and charitable rules established by Him for the redemption of mankind. God elects men on the basis of the qualities which they exhibit and develop rather than in the blind and irrational manner imagined by the orthodox. Calvinism, he charged, has made of the world a chaos which only the mind of God can comprehend.[1] The orthodox position is wholly untenable and assails the very attributes of God. "To conceive that God applieth Himself with such moving and melting expressions of mercy, tenderness . . . love, grace, bounty, towards His creature man, as the Scripture emphatically asserts that He doth; promising them life and glory if they will believe and turn to Him; and yet to suppose that these men . . . are destitute of all power to do what He requires of them, is to represent the glorious God, in His greatest expressions of mercy, grace, and love, rather as laughing the world to scorn in that great misery wherein it is plunged, than as a God truly desirous and intending to relieve it."[2]

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[1] Goodwin, *Redemption redeemed*, 268.

[2] Goodwin, John, *The divine authority of the scriptures asserted, etc.* (L., 1647, *1648*), 17.

God has "predestinated" for salvation all who should believe in Him, and has given to all men the capacity for such belief.[3] God has revealed Himself to men fully both in nature and in the Bible. Even before the Christian era, men were possessed of saving knowledge in the natural light which God had implanted in their hearts.[4] The Testament of Christ represents, then, a further unfolding of that revelation as part of a process by which men have been admitted to greater knowledge as their capacity has been enlarged. All men in all ages have been seised with the potentialities of salvation. This view alone is consonant with the goodness and mercy of God, "whereas that doomful preterition, that blood which many wring out of the Scriptures instead of milk, hath no intelligible comfort with any of them [i.e. scriptures], but casts a kind of obscenity upon them all."[5]

All men who seek God within the range of the ability and knowledge which He has made available to them may attain salvation. God has revealed His truth in the law of nature quite as efficiently as in His written word, thereby assuring all men in all ages of the possibility of salvation. Goodwin conceived true religion in a sense much broader than the Christian Church as usually defined. Belief is a conscious act which a

[1] Freund, *Die Idee der Toleranz*, 203–204.

[2] Goodwin, *The divine authority*, 169.

[3] Goodwin, *Redemption redeemed*, 68.

[4] Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, I, 263.

[5] Goodwin, *Redemption redeemed*, 68.

man may attain in a variety of ways, but it must be a voluntary action. Faith does not add to the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice but it does ensure men of an interest and share in it.[1] This covenant between man and God existed long before the coming of Christ and even before the Bible had been written.[2] The true Church has through all the ages been composed of those who sought the truth of God with the agencies which lay within their disposition. Men cannot be forced into one mould of belief, nor ought the Church of God "to be tied in one knot, and kneaded in one lump; distinct congregations . . . may speak one and the same thing, although in different manner; and like birds that sing divers notes yet make one harmony . . . though diversely delivered."[3]

Goodwin's doctrinal position had, of course, profoundly significant implications for religious toleration. Persecution became inconceivable and impious in the perspective of a philosophy which so far broadened the limits of doctrinal orthodoxy as to define religious truth in purely relativistic terms. Salvation, Goodwin declared, was achieved by the individual human being who sought God earnestly and piously whether within or without the bounds of the society usually denominated Christian. No man can assume the responsibility for another's salvation. Man became noble, self-sustaining, and terribly alone in Goodwin's theory. But in that theory all vestige of reason for religious coercion was destroyed. Goodwin denied the possibility of positive dogma and thereby invalidated the *raison d'être* of the persecuting philosophy which had with some logic undergirded all exclusive religious systems. The Church in his mature thought loses all institutional character; the emphasis devolves exclusively to the individual man. He established freedom of conscience and worship as a natural right essential to the very achievement of the ends to which man was dedicated. In fact, religion can have but limited meaning and development without this prime condition of its existence. For faith is neither bestowed by God as a free gift nor ordained by authority for men's salvation; it can be attained only by man's individual effort.

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[1] Goodwin, *Redemption redeemed*, 195.

[2] Goodwin, *The divine authority*, 13.

[3] G., J., (i.e. Goodwin, John), *Independencie God's veritie; or, the necessitie of toleration* (L., 1647), 5.

As we should expect, Goodwin's liberalism in doctrine was to be reflected in his later writings in a broader and more zealous defence of religious liberty. This is particularly apparent in his discussion of religious coercion and persecution. The civil State, Goodwin again insists, is complete within itself and has no legitimate role in religious affairs.[1] The magistrate is concerned strictly with the administration of the temporal interests of his subjects and has no spiritual capacity. Those who maintain the power of the civil State in religious causes grant to it by implication a divinely ordained authority to rule infallibly in the worship of God.[2] They would make religion the pawn of State policy and repose it upon no more solid foundation than the caprice of the ruler.[3] Moreover, the teaching that all impiety should be repressed by the State is not derived from God's Word. Such a policy is far more likely to "abolish all religion, and true knowledg of God, out of the minds of men" than to secure the correction of error.[4] The ends of Christ are best served when the affairs of Church and State are sharply differentiated.

In the period of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, Goodwin had advanced so far in his advocacy of complete liberty of conscience that he was dissatisfied with the large measure of religious toleration which Cromwell and the left wing of Independency had achieved. He disliked the preoccupation with fundamentals of faith and held that the Government was in effect guilty of coercing those who according to pious opinion did not adhere to the essentials of Christian dogma. He demanded unrestricted liberty and the complete separation of Church and State. In particular, Goodwin regarded the Cromwellian church settlement as an attempt to intrude into areas which should be left absolutely free. The commissions of triers and ejectors, though composed of just and humble men, contained the fatal germs of spiritual coercion and were consequently without scriptural warrant. It is especially dangerous to repose authority in such tribunals when pious and godly men are divided in their judgments, for thereby you "set up and arm one of these parties with power and authority to judge and sentence the other, yea to tread and trample them under their feet like clay and mire. . . ."[1] Any such interference by the State will in the end secure the coercive verdict of the majority over the minority. Religious truth will be determined by the naked sanction of power. "Wo to such a generation of men that shall spread such snares of death; lay such stumbling-blocks as these in their brethren's way."[2] The Government, Goodwin alleged, has undertaken to prescribe to Jesus Christ what manner of men He would designate for His ministry. The State has placed in the hands of fallible men a weapon competent to secure the propagation and perpetuation of faction and the "wringing and straining of many mens consciences, by imposing the bloody law of a necessity upon them."[3]

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[1] Goodwin, John, *Thirty queries, modestly propounded in order to a discovery of the truth, etc.* (L., 1653), 3.

[2] Goodwin, John, *The apologist condemned: or, a vindication of the Thirty Queries, etc.* (L., 1653), 31.

[3] *Ibid.*, 22–23.

[4] *Ibid.*, 19.

Goodwin was extremely sensitive to any influence which might lead even indirectly to the coercion of conscience. Thus, when in 1654 certain London booksellers recommended to the Protector the establishment of an orthodox licensing board which would restrain heretical books, Goodwin exploded with indignation. "When," he demanded, "doth the Lord Christ, authorize any person, or persons, of what capacity soever, to authorize or appoint any number of men, whom they shall please to call orthodox."[4] The magistrate will inevitably determine orthodoxy in the light of his own irrelevant views. Any restraint on conscience is an indignity to the human spirit and represents a dangerous and illegal invasion by the magistrate of areas in which he enjoys not the slightest jurisdiction.

The earlier position which Goodwin had assumed on the important question of the proper treatment of heresy and error likewise underwent considerable modification as a result of the softening of his earlier Calvinism. We have noticed that he had then held that the Church must insulate itself against error and that certain extreme forms of heterodoxy or unbelief could not be given unlimited freedom in the Christian State. But two influences operated to remove the last element of intolerance in his thought. It will be observed, in the first place, that his defence of the doctrine of general redemption made it necessary to grant to all men the prerogative of seeking God independently. Even the pagans and unbelievers have a saving knowledge of God through the religious instinct which is engrained in their hearts. Men may be saved who have never heard the name of Christ. Repentance of sin has always led to faith in Christ whether the name of Christ is known or not. God "hath so far accepted an attonement for them, that in case they shall truly repent of their former sins, and persevere repentant unto the end, they shall escape the punishment due unto their sins, and consequently be saved."[1] All men have been endowed with the "impression of good and evil" which has made available to them at least the saving kernel of Christ's truth.[2]

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[1] Goodwin, John, *βασανισται or the triers* (*or tormenters*) *tryed and cast, by the laws both of God and of men, etc.* (L., 1657), 8.

[2] *Ibid.*, 10.

[3] *Ibid.*, 16.

[4] Goodwin, *A fresh discovery*, 5.

And, in the second place, Goodwin's earlier scepticism concerning the possibility of distinguishing accurately between truth and error had under the impact of doctrinal relativism given way to a zealous denial of the possibility of the distinction. Absolute disproof of a religious position is the only reasonable basis upon which persecution can be undertaken. We are restrained by the reflection that every attack upon a religious teaching is an attack upon God unless we possess incontrovertible proof of its falsity. This certainty even the most presumptuous and bigoted do not dare claim to possess. Even the orthodox ministry in England, who have branded popery, Arianism, and Arminianism as heresies, have done so "without so much as levying one word of an argument against them to convince the assertors or maintainers of them."[3] We cannot incur the awful risk of branding men as heretics without cause. The days of popish tyranny and imperious persecution have disappeared since men have come to realize that no human being can prescribe truth beyond the limits of his own knowledge. Civil pains and torments are wholly impotent in the restraint of error, or what the orthodox declare to be error. Such repression is as ridiculous as an attempt "to set a company of armed men about an house to keep darknesse out of it in the night season. For as the natural darknesse cannot be prevented, or dispelled, but by the presence of light, nor needeth there to be anything, either for the preventing or dispelling it, but light onely."[1] Religious truth can prevail only in a medium of freedom and tolerance. England must destroy forever the authority which imperious men have usurped over the human conscience, godly and erroneous alike. No longer shall men be persuaded to condemn as heretical that which bigoted clerics "shall baptize by the name of error."[2] Heresy must remain completely unmolested until God shall move the heart of the unbeliever. The Church can do no more than assist him with charity and patience in finding his way towards truth. No man can be compelled to submit to any doctrine until his mind has been convinced by its own free contemplation.[3] Christ has forbidden us to exercise "any degree of severity against blasphemers, seducers, heretiques, erroneous persons . . . simply as such, for that reason."[4]

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[1] Goodwin, John, *The pagans debt and dowry, etc.* (L., 1651), 9–10.

[2] *Ibid.*, 22–23.

[3] Goodwin, John, *Sion-colledg visited. Or, some briefe animadversions upon a pamphlet lately published, under the title of, A testimonie to the truth of Jesus Christ . . . by the ministers of London, etc.* (L., 1648), 7.

Goodwin held that England must embrace the principles of the true reformation which allow to all men and all sects freedom of enquiry and liberty of worship. The land will gain peace and spiritual maturity in this atmosphere of freedom. The ruler will withdraw from that interference in religion which has in the past so often marked him as a usurper of divine prerogatives.[5] The controversy and bloodshed which have accompanied the efforts to attain a sterile uniformity by force of arms will be terminated. Religious toleration will "take away all occasions of tumults and garboiles, for when every man is permitted to use his conscience according as he is persuaded in himselfe, they will esteem their burthens not halfe so heavy as before. . . ."[6] The nation has tasted the benefits of a precious liberty of conscience which it can never again be persuaded to relinquish. It has learned that blind men cannot be given vision by the prescription of authority,[1] that no authority on earth can discriminate with certainty between the orthodox and the heretical.[2] Men have in consequence proceeded boldly towards the determination of truth according to the infallible rule of their own judgment. The land stirs with spiritual vitality and an earnest seeking after truth. Men "are grown more various in their opinions than ever before, and will be as easily persuaded to forsake their meat, as to relinquish their tenets."[3]

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[1] Goodwin, *A fresh discovery*, 9.

[2] Goodwin, *Sion-colledg visited*, 9.

[3] Goodwin, *Thirty queries*, 6.

[4] *Ibid.*, 5.

[5] *Ibid.*, 8–9.

[6] Goodwin, *Independencie God's veritie*, 8.

In short, Christians have been emancipated into spiritual maturity by the loosening of ecclesiastical authority in England. They have taken into their own hands the responsibility for their salvation. They have learned that the gospel of Christ stands in need of no human commission to assist it. God has proved wholly competent in bestowing upon men that knowledge wherewith they may attain salvation, though "the professing powers of this world, have in all times had itching desires to be officious unto Jesus Christ . . . and to obtrude upon Him their own projectors and inventions to accommodate and help Him through the world with His worship and gospel."[4] Christians have gained, and must maintain, the precious prerogative of spiritual independence, the right to try all things and to arrive at truth freely and personally.[5] The restraints which have for so long impeded the advancement of truth through a blind and imperious authority must be forever shattered. England will in the triumph of religious liberty achieve for the Christian man the full stature of spiritual maturity; for the Church the emancipation of those spiritual forces which alone give it vitality; for the civil State the destruction of that coercive capacity which has long impeded the development of its true functions and divided it into warring factions; and for civilization the happy termination of a hideous persecution which has writ its history with the blood of the innocent.

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[1] Goodwin, *Thirty queries*, 9.

[2] *Ibid.*, 14.

[3] Goodwin, *Independencie God's veritie*, 8.

[4] Goodwin, *βασανισται or the triers* (*or tormenters*) *tryed and cast*, 17–18.

[5] Freund, *Die Idee der Toleranz*, 212; Goodwin, *A fresh discovery*, 17.

c. Summary

John Goodwin's contribution to the development of religious toleration must be regarded as of very great importance. During rather more than two decades he wrote persistently and effectively in an attempt to portray for England the choice which she must make between tolerance and intolerance. It should be said that the weight of his argument was launched rather against the evils of intolerance than in the defence of a positive theory of toleration. Yet this cannot be represented as an indication that he was without determined and zealous devotion to religious liberty in the broadest meaning of that term. The great task confronting moderate and tolerant men during these decades in England was the completion of the demolition of the bulwarks of orthodox rigidity and the destruction of the remnants of the persecuting philosophy. The ground of theory had to be cleared of these impediments before religious toleration could be discussed in other than theoretical terms. Goodwin contributed vastly to the achievement of this end. He addressed himself to the abuses and dangers which at the moment appeared to threaten the cause of tolerance; he fought in the front trenches where the perspective of battle is limited to the attainment of a definite objective or the defence of a particularly precious salient. The very character of his contribution to religious liberty, quite as much as his tempestuous nature, precluded philosophical defence of the theory of religious toleration.

Goodwin exhibited a flexible, keen, and pragmatic intelligence. During most of our period he may properly be regarded as an Independent, though always in terms of his own definition. His thought was essentially lay in character, being devoid of the sectarian preoccupation and the doctrinal limitations which continued to becloud the clerical consideration of the problems which so harassed England in this era. Goodwin fought in the ranks of the Independents so long as that remarkable alliance was essential for the defence of spiritual liberty against the embattled hosts of Calvinistic orthodoxy. He displayed rare perception in regarding Independency as a defensive coalition which retained effectiveness and possessed meaning only so long as the objective of religious liberty remained to be won. When his thought is compared with that of his more conservative, or more radical, colleagues, the amazing diversity of Independency is manifest.

We find in microcosm in Goodwin's thought the spiritual ferment which was finally to destroy Puritan and Anglican rigidity during these two momentous decades. Goodwin's thought was elastic and organic. We have observed that he proceeded during this period from liberal Puritanism, through Independency and Arminianism, to a spiritual individualism that defies categorical analysis. The inflexible limits of orthodoxy were to be permanently broken during these years by an amazing spiritual revival, posited on the tolerance which in fact prevailed for almost twenty years, which not only spawned innumerable sects but which engendered a kind of lay Christianity that must be denominated Christian individualism rather than sectarianism. The vessel of orthodoxy was dashed into countless fragments during this period—fragments which could never again be assembled or joined by the most patient and persistent efforts of men still enamoured of a catholic orthodoxy which no longer possessed meaning in a modern world. In the achievement of this end Goodwin's career must be regarded as important. A master of controversy, fearless and clear of mind, he had fought a stern and unflinching fight against the pretensions of orthodoxy. Always outstripping public opinion he had remained one of its most influential leaders. His unbroken series of writings had exercised not inconsiderable effect in the hardening of the devotion of Independent, sectarian, and lay thought to the principles of religious liberty.

8. Hugh Peters, 1598–1660

Independency developed in the struggle with orthodox intolerance a philosophy and a programme which were secular in spirit and almost rationalistic in temper. John Goodwin had powerfully assisted this tendency and had been largely responsible for the formulation of a philosophy broad enough to include within the vague confines of the movement all men sincerely devoted to the attainment of religious liberty in

England. Hugh Peters was perhaps the most significant of a still more radical group, comprising the left wing of Independency, whose thought was frankly secular and who undertook the conversion of Parliament and the army to the principles of toleration.

Peters, a native of Cornwall, had been educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was graduated in 1618. He became a minister during the next decade, subscribing as late as 1627 to the formularies of the Established Church. He emigrated to the Continent in 1629, however, and became in 1632 the minister to the English congregation in Rotterdam. At about this time he was converted to the principles of Congregationalism. Peters emigrated to New England in 1635. As pastor of the Salem (Massachusetts) church he was regarded as a stalwart pillar of New England theocracy, having in this period appeared against Mrs. Hutchinson, and having excommunicated the turbulent Roger Williams. In 1641 Peters returned to England on a colonial mission.

The effect of the war and of the Presbyterian ecclesiastical demands upon conservative Congregational thought is strikingly demonstrated in the transformation which occurred in Peters's religious philosophy shortly after his arrival in England. He was soon engrossed in the prosecution of the war and in the defence of a radical conception of Independency. As early as 1643 he was properly regarded as the most influential of the notable band of Independent army chaplains, and after 1646 he was to exercise a widespread influence on both religious and political thought.[1] Peters had but slight interest in theology, was but vaguely committed to any form of ecclesiastical organization, and was distressed by the rising bitterness and intolerance of theological discussion in England. He approached the problems of his age pragmatically, with warm and genial wisdom, and with an appeal addressed to the English instinct for compromise.[2] Devoted to religious liberty, Peters rested his arguments upon necessity and common sense rather than upon any abstruse argument based on philosophical right. He was deeply suspicious of the clerical mind, demanding that the questions which the clergy appeared willing to solve only by coercion and persecution should be removed forthwith into the arena of lay discussion and decision.[1] Peters rendered invaluable aid to the parliamentary cause by his remarkable ability in raising troops and in maintaining the morale of the army. During the Cromwellian regime he was high in the counsels of State and Church. When it appeared that religious toleration had been made secure, Peters's boundless energy was turned towards the achievement of social and legal reformation. The almost fanatically liberal Roger Williams complained that in this period Peters, though still devoted to the cause of religious liberty, preached it with less zeal than in earlier years.[2] The career of this remarkable and zealous defender of the republican Establishment marked him irrevocably for sacrifice upon the altar of the Restoration. He was executed as a regicide in 1660.

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[1] Edwards, *Gangraena*, i, 40.

[2] *Vide* Gardiner's comments, *Civil War*, II, 325–326.

Peters did not seek to give to the principles of religious toleration a full or systematic defence. He assumed, indeed, that all good and sane men were devoted to spiritual liberty and hence directed his attention to the problem of preserving it by state policy against the machinations of the bigoted. The spread of the Gospel of Christ has for too long been hindered by repression and persecution. Men have sought the aggrandizement of their own sectarian glosses through the destruction of all those who oppose them.[3] These men have exalted themselves above Christ and have kept the people in the subjection of ignorance. Orthodoxy has always justified the horrors of persecution by the plea that it seeks only the destruction of error.[4] Indeed, even now Parliament is being "buzz'd in the ear" concerning the vast increase in error. The bigoted mind ignores the fact that error is seated in the understanding and can be cured only by its correction. "Reasonable souls may sooner certainly be taught with reason and scripture, then with cudgels and blowes . . . *religio docenda est, non coercenda*."[1] We are commanded to proceed very timidly and charitably against error, which not infrequently masks an enlargement of God's truth and purpose.[2]

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[1] "Truly it woundes my soule, when I thinke Ireland would perish, and England continue her misery through the disagreement of ten or twenty learned men." (Peters, Hugh, *Mr. Peters last report of the English wars, etc.* (L., 1646), 6.)

[2] *Roger Williams to John Winthrop*, July 12, 1654, *The Letters of Roger Williams* (ed. by J. R. Bartlett) (*Narragansett Club Publ.*, VI, Providence, R.I., 1874), 259. The letter was written shortly after Williams's return from his second visit in England.

[3] [Peters, Hugh], *The way to the peace and settlement of these nations, etc.* (L., 1659), 10.

[4] Peters, Hugh, *A dying father's last legacy to an only child: or, Mr. Hugh Peters' advice to his daughter* (L., 1660).

The clash of contending bigotries and infallibilities has had a happy issue. Men have at last been compelled to abandon the dictates of authority and to seek religious truth for themselves. Sectarianism has become so rampant that men have renounced the sects, placing themselves in simple and complete dependence upon Christ and His Word. England has come to realize that force and tyranny are quite insufficient in gaining the ends which all pious men desire; that reason and persuasion alone are competent instruments for the attainment of religious truth and unity.[3] The fury of the prelates destroyed forever the possibility of forging anew a persecuting Church in the nation. England will not soon forget those days when "a base messenger from a proud prelate could shut up these doors, stop the mouth of the most godly ministers. . . ."[4] England has heard more of Christ since the overthrow of the prelatical tyranny than in the forty years before. This great gain has been sealed and ensured by the awful propitiation of war. But what has been gained by the sword must now be maintained by the Word.[5] The sword is competent to destroy persecution but not to maintain liberty. Coercion and discipline can drive a nation into a church, but cannot create a Christian Church. Godly men must now dedicate themselves to the amelioration of factions and to the advancement of truth by the spiritual weapons with which they are charged. They will accept only that to which their reason compels them and will repose their trust in no one save Christ.[6]

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[1] Peters, Hugh, *Gods doings, and mans duty, etc.* (L., 1646), *Dedic.*

[2] *Ibid.*, 8, 12.

[3] [Peters], *The way to the peace and settlement*, 11.

[4] Peters, *Gods doings, and mans duty*, 14.

[5] *Ibid.*, 39.

[6] [Peters], *The way to the peace and settlement*, 12.

In several pamphlets Peters sketched in broad outline the religious settlement which he felt would best ensure the religious liberty so essential for the preservation and enlargement of spiritual life in England. His views were completely secular in spirit and appear to proceed from a deep-seated suspicion of clerical bigotry. He would extend to the State the mastery of religious life on the grounds that the State alone can act as a guarantor of religious toleration. The State should restrain the counsels of fanaticism, should protect all men in the worship to which conscience and reason impel them, and should maintain a wholly objective neutrality between the bickering sects that comprise it. In Peters's thought English Erastianism achieved a peculiar but logical fruition. The State should be invested with lay religious authority to the end that religious zeal may be restrained within the limits of the toleration upon which its ecclesiastical policy is founded. The State must destroy effectively and permanently the persecution and bigotry which have for so long threatened the sources of its own solidity and which have chronically harassed truly pious men. The break with medieval theory in this important particular becomes sharply defined and substantially complete in Peters's thought.

The bickering and bigotry which have so disturbed religion in England were the consequence, Peters alleged, of the ruthless ambition of ten or twenty men in the Assembly who desired to fasten upon England still another infallible system of orthodoxy. The divisions which mar the Church in England can be healed only by Christian charity and sympathy. "Let us much studie, hold forth, and rejoyce in what we agree . . . and grieve others in what we differ."[1] All men cannot be forced by arbitrary spiritual authority into the same mould of opinion, nor will the same last fit the English and the Scottish foot. England must proceed cautiously and tenderly in defining its Church government, with a high resolution to allow to all men a sufficient latitude of conscience. The State must "keepe a good bolt" upon that door which excludes coercion and a revival of persecution. "I am confident," Peters wrote, "the chiefe meanes to greater [increase] an error will be by violence and opposition, when slighted it dyes; coales blowne get heat and strength, neglected grow cold."[1] All communions that profess Christ must be granted complete liberty even though they are denounced by the orthodox as corrupted with error. The magistrate must protect all churches in their worship, while restraining by penalties those that "abuse another, either in word or deed, in private or publick." Not until then "shall the churches have peace, and bee daily multiplied."[2] England cannot escape the awful danger of religious persecution until it extends legal toleration to all "whose principles or practises are not dangerous to the government, peace, proprietie, and good of the Common-wealth; if they otherwise live but civilly."[3]

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[1] Peters, *Mr. Peters last report of the English wars*, 7.

All Christian communions, Peters taught, should be tolerated in the free exercise of their religious rites and preaching. This freedom should be limited only in the event of overt actions against the peace of the State or the structure of toleration itself. Any sect should be admitted to this liberty by the simple act of delivering to the civil authority the articles of its faith, pointing out wherein it differs from others, and by rendering a solemn promise to deal charitably with all other communions.[4] Peters held that the doctrinal differences between the innumerable Christian groups were in reality inconsequential. He suggested, jocosely perhaps, that if the warring clerics could be constrained to dine together occasionally their differences would speedily evaporate.[5] Indeed, it might not be amiss to punish both the Presbyterians and the Independents until they are able to demonstrate the differences which cause them to deal so harshly with each other. The Church of Christ cannot tolerate the perpetuation of the evil temper from which persecution and bigotry flow.[6] Parliament must make certain that imperious spirits will not be permitted to erect in England an ecclesiastical system which seeks by infallible and exclusive claims to coerce the consciences of other men. It must refuse to permit "any confession of faith [to] be set upon the throne, as equal with the holy Scripture; for confessions are only to distinguish one sect from another. Assist not with the sword, or money of the Common-wealth any sect, or person in particular; that you may not hinder the truth . . . from manifesting it self by it's own power."[1] The fangs of bigotry and intolerance must be irrevocably pulled in England.

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[1] Peters, *Mr. Peters last report of the English wars*, 8.

[2] P., H., [i.e. Peters, Hugh], *Good work for a good magistrate. Or, a short cut to great quiet. . . . Concerning religion; mercie; justice* (L., 1651), 14.

[3] *Ibid.*, 34.

[4] *Ibid.*, 15–16.

[5] Peters, *Mr. Peters last report of the English wars*, 7.

[6] Peters, *Good work for a good magistrate*, 16.

Writing in 1659, Peters discussed at some length the administration of the tolerant settlement which he had so warmly defended.[2] The magistrate should maintain a position of complete objectivity and impartiality in religion. His interests extend far beyond the confines of any sect; he is commanded to cherish and protect all of his subjects. He should favour and support no sect, but should "stand immoveable in the centre, (as moderators) between all sects."[3] He is charged with the punishment of evil-doing and not with the persecution of religious opinion. Standing aloof from all factions, the ruler will be freed from the disturbing influence of those who "seek to domineer over others, it being the nature of such, who finding their own weakness, do make power and force their refuge."[4] The State should carefully refrain from any interference in spiritual concerns and should steadily decline to substitute its will for the will of God. It will be sustained in this course, not only by the counsels of piety, but by the reflection that when the civil authority seeks to advance one sect it weakens thereby the very fabric of the State.[5] The magistrate will govern all and will steadily decline to confuse policy and religion. He will "suffer all sorts of people (of what religion soever they are) in one countrey, as God (the great magistrate) suffers the same in all the countreys of the world."[6] He will make sure that all his subjects are freely fed with the light of saving truth, "though they have severall faces and shapes."[7]

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[1] [Peters], *The way to the peace and settlement*, 3.

[2] In *The way to the peace and settlement*, which was signed "Peter Cornelius." The tract may be tentatively assigned to Peters on the basis of textual evidence. The point of view is precisely that expressed in Peters's known works; the style and language are strikingly reminiscent of his writing; and the pamphlet displays Peters's almost inimitable eccentricities of syntax.

[3] [Peters], *The way to the peace and settlement*, 3.

[4] *Ibid.*, 26.

[5] *Ibid.*, 4–5.

[6] *Ibid.*, 5.

[7] Peters, Hugh, *A word for the armie. And two words to the kingdome. To cleare the one, and cure the other, etc.* (L., 1647), 12.

He will ensure to all men of all religious persuasions that complete liberty of enquiry and worship which alone is competent for the extirpation of heresy and error.[1]

Peters regarded the Cromwellian settlement of religion as an epochal achievement in the extension of religious liberty under the watchful tolerance of an enlightened State. But even this system required amplification, since the State must be perpetually on guard against the bigoted sects which still demanded exclusive spiritual jurisdiction.[2] The magistrate must be scrupulous in preserving the domain of conscience against the violent intrusion of intolerant arrogance. He must enforce a rule of freedom for all his people of whatever persuasion and found a haven of refuge for the oppressed of other lands. When the habits of tolerance and charity have been established under the attentive care of the magistrate the State will have gained dignity and stability, and religion will have secured freedom and the promise of endless enrichment.

Religious toleration should rest upon the legal recognition of the liberty of all sects, no matter how eccentric, to exist and worship without fear or hindrance. This does not preclude the possibility of a National Church which may properly seek to embrace all pious and religious men within its bounds, but such an Establishment must recognize without reservation the absolute right of dissent.[3] The Church should strive to gain unity in the spiritual life of the nation through a breadth and liberalism of doctrine which will include all men who profess Christ.[4] Men who have suffered the intolerant bondage of sectarianism will seek refuge in the charitable recesses of its tolerance.[5] Directly the principle of coercion is driven out of religious life, the Christian unity of which all godly men have dreamed may be attained. Men will no longer be imprisoned in the "cages of interpretation" into which the sects have driven them but will freely seek truth and, at the same time, unity in the Bible, which is the sole repository of Christian knowledge. All men will be encouraged to think and enquire without restraint, and the doctrinal conclusions of no ecclesiastical authority will be imposed upon them. In these happy circumstances the damp fogs of error will be scattered before the clean winds of truth, and men may expect to find in the freedom hitherto denied to them that unity which the hideous arms of persecution have been unable to attain.

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[1] [Peters], *The way to the peace and settlement*, 26–27.

[2] *Ibid.*, 7–8.

[3] *Ibid.*, 13.

[4] *Ibid.*, 15.

[5] *Ibid.*, 20.

Peters's thought, in summary, may be said to illustrate the breadth and power of the coalition which under the name of Independency laboured so effectively for the attainment of religious toleration. His point of view was fresh, infectious, and carefully designed to appeal to the common sense of the ordinary layman. His thought gained force through the almost casual assumption that a legally established rule of religious liberty could alone solve the grave crisis which so harassed England in the two decades under consideration. Peters was not concerned with defending a religious freedom which he accepted as axiomatic; he addressed himself, rather, to the task of implementing and extending that liberty. His conception of Christianity was wholly undogmatic and he evidently held that all men who professed the name of Christ should be protected in the exercise of their faith, however dimly they might perceive His great truths. Peters was foremost in an important group of writers who shortly after the execution of the king succeeded in persuading substantial elements of public opinion that the Civil War had been waged quite as much to secure the destruction of religious coercion as to sweep away political bondage. The basis of the settlement which Cromwell ultimately made in religion may be said to have rested squarely upon these foundations. The war, Peters argued, had in no small degree been made inevitable by the increasing weight of religious persecution which threatened to destroy the very vitality of religion. The awful threat of persecution, whether prelatical or Presbyterian, had been shattered by the State, which must now undertake to define and maintain a framework of religious toleration in which all men could find freedom and spiritual security. Nor was that all. The State might well assist even further in the restraint of bigotry by encouraging the erection of a National Church whose doctrinal limits would be as inclusive as simple belief in the efficacy of Christ's teachings. Sectarian bitterness and pretensions should be diffused and extinguished in a Church whose latitude was so great as to include all Christian groups.

These views Peters presented with masterly skill. He wrote with a complete secularity which displays at once his conviction that religious problems must be finally determined by the unfanatical genius of the lay mind and his distrust and contempt for clerical arrogance. Peters wrote with a rough, burly, and salty style which addressed itself to lay groups in England that were shortly to break the dead-lock of the ecclesiastical problem in the interests of enlarged freedom. To no small degree Peters was instrumental in fusing lay opinion, particularly in the army, with the main body of Independent thought. From this time forward Independency was carried by the greater mass and the greater radicalism of its left wing farther in the direction of religious liberty.

9. JOHN COOK, *d.* 1660

The radical wing of Independency detected clearly that common devotion to the principles of religious toleration constituted the sole cement of this strangely diverse coalition. The thinkers of the group exploited and expanded this principle so zealously and so effectively that they were in the end able to secure leadership of the party and to engulf the more timorous and conservative Congregational base of the movement. We have previously shown how Independency, by a remarkable and almost unscrupulous expansion of certain tolerant principles implicit in Congregationalism, forged a powerful party which was to assist Cromwell so importantly in the tolerant solution of the religious problems of the nation. We have seen this development in the thought of John Goodwin and Hugh Peters, who remained constantly in the vanguard of rapidly evolving Independent theory. It may be observed quite as clearly in the thought of a layman, John Cook, who wrote as an Independent though his thought was in fact quite as secular as that of Peters. Writing shortly before the close of the first Civil War, Cook maintained that a system of Independency founded upon the principle of toleration could alone restore peace and religious vitality in England.[1] But it will be observed that Cook had a larger and far more tolerant conception of Independency than had its more conservative champions who had recently been forging its philosophy on the anvil of disputation at Westminster.

Cook suggested that the Independents would never be content until they were left "free to choose their own company, place and time, with whom, where and when to worship God, as they are in the choice of their wives; for a forced marriage will not hold."[2] This principle represented no distortion of Congregational theory, which, however, tended to include within its tolerant implications only those congregations of the regenerate that met the test of a fairly rigid doctrinal formula. Cook and his radical associates seized upon this principle and, doing infinite violence to historical Congregational thought, extended it to all groups that might even remotely be regarded as Christian. The Independent, Cook declared, looks with favour upon every man who "believes in Jesus Christ, and is content to be every man's servant, so as Christ may but reign over his conscience," even though he be mired in error.[3] Independency, according to Cook's conception, is the professed enemy of all "imperative, co-active violence in matters of conscience . . . and thinks that to force men to come to church is but to make them hypocrites."[4] The Independent seeks his faith by free enquiry into God's truth rather than at the command of authority. His charity is large, and his conception of God's charity is so broad that he remains convinced that "far [the] greater part" of men in England will be saved. He seeks to retain complete spiritual independence and grants to every other man a similar liberty of conscience. Heresy and error yield only to spiritual persuasion, and the Independent grants that "it is no proper way to confute an heretick, to break his head with the Bible."[1] The truly convinced Independent will yield only when his reason is persuaded "by scripture weapons; and in reading Scriptures, neither stretches things wider, nor draws them narrower than God has made them; hee holds persuasion[2] to be the gospellary way, and that liberty of religion to all protestants, is the bond of religion against papists."[3]

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[1] Very little is now known concerning the career of this important thinker. He was a lawyer by profession and was for some time with Strafford in Ireland. An early and outspoken republican, Cook prosecuted the case against Charles I. He served in Ireland under Cromwell in important judicial posts. He was executed as a regicide in 1660.

[2] Cook, John, *What the Independents would have, or, a character, declaring some of their tenents, and their desires to disabuse those who speak ill of that they know not* (L., 1647), 2.

[3] *Ibid.*, 3.

[4] *Ibid.*, 4.

Religion will best be secured, Cook argued, by the extension of an almost unlimited freedom of religious belief and worship. Most spiritual errors are seated in the weak judgment of those who are in reality strong in zeal for Christ. Men rarely, if ever, err by deliberate choice, and will find their way through the morass of heresy and spiritual uncertainty if their beliefs are not hardened by the hammer of persecution. A Christian State cannot tolerate sects which err with respect to the fundamentals of faith, but in Cook's view the fundamentals were held by even the most radical sects in the Commonwealth. Thus, the Baptists are in error but certainly their error is harmless. The Seekers sin only by too great enthusiasm and intolerance, while Cook knew of "no hurt in a million of millenary" errors.[4] All of the sects in England, Cook held, were in the way of salvation, and hence it would be an act of grave impiety and persecution to impose religious restraints upon them. England must dedicate herself to rearing a spiritual edifice which affords complete toleration, "conceiving liberty to be the best means to cure all such differences, and that the sword hath no capacity to settle religion being not sanctified to that purpose; and if imprisonment cure an heretick, 'tis but like his curing an enemy by letting out the impostume, when he thought to kill him; for mysticall wolves are to be kill'd mystically."[5] Compulsion can have no other consequence than the persecution of countless saints and the destruction of that charity which may be said to constitute the Christian life.

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[1] Cook, *What the Independents would have*, 6.

[2] At this point in the margin of the Dr. Williams's library copy of the pamphlet this comment is made in a contemporary hand: "The reason I suppose why the children of some of them [i.e. Independents], yea of their ministers, are so rude and barbarously educated; I speak this of mine owne knowledge of some godly orthodox persons come out of New England strangely indulgent to their children."

[3] Cook, *What the Independents would have*, 5.

[4] *Ibid.*, 8.

[5] *Ibid.*, 9.

Few writers in any period have given to religious liberty so complete and unqualified a defence as did Cook. Persecution, he maintained, has had the awful effect of condemning men in their errors who might have found God had they enjoyed the freedom which is their birthright; it has stultified and paralysed that individualism which is implicit in Christian faith; and it has exalted an external authority over the human conscience without the warrant of reason or of scripture. England must vindicate the freedom of the Christian man by extending to him absolute liberty in religion. The nation must destroy forever the "theological scar-crows" with which the orthodox have enslaved the State and the Christian. When this liberty is attained men will soon discover that they occupy common ground in their devotion to Christ and to His faith; they will perceive that the differences which have so long and so grievously divided them are in reality picayune; they will apprehend that "the interest of all honest, godly men is wrapt up in a speedy union, to love one another entirely, though of different judgments."[1] Men can no longer beg for liberty to be Christian; they must assert with fine independence this prerogative which God has vested in them. The last tentacles of persecution and restraint must be severed and Christian liberty must be restored to the world.[2]

Cook gave to the principle of religious toleration an effective, thoughtful, and vigorous defence. The reader is struck by the remarkable similarity in style and thought that exists between his writings and those of Peters, his more distinguished colleague. These men fought in the extreme left wing of Independency in close proximity to the radical lay and sectarian thinkers of the age, who were even more advanced in their position. In the thought of Cook and Peters Independency was strained to such a latitudinarian conception that it resembles, on the one hand, extreme sectarianism, and, on the other, secularism. The fact is that these men, and scores like them, were primarily interested in securing religious toleration in England. In this great struggle they employed the respectable

[1] Cook, *What the Independents would have*, 13.

[2] *Ibid.*, 14.

cloak of Independency because it served them best in the notable task to which they had set their hands. Their zeal, their intense conviction, and the evident sanity of their position contrived to convert the great mass of Independent thought from the apologetical and subjective support of religious toleration by its early leaders in 1644 to a far more extended and effective position on this great question a decade later.

10. JOHN OWEN, 1616–1683

Our discussion of the major Independent theorists may well be concluded by a criticism of the thought of John Owen, whom history has tended to regard as the most distinguished of that remarkable coalition. Owen's reputation rests primarily on his prominence as an ecclesiastical statesman in the period under consideration. Belonging to the younger generation of Independent leaders, Owen exhibited neither the bitter fear of prelacy nor the almost fanatical opposition to Presbyterian bigotry so marked in the older thinkers of his party. His talents were administrative and conciliatory; his voluminous writings display scant originality, no ordered philosophy, and but slight substance. A moderate Presbyterian in his early career, he embraced the cause of moderate Independency about 1645.[1] This shift in Owen's party allegiance was accomplished with an amazingly slight shift in his religious views or in his attitude concerning religious toleration. Owen remained conservative on these questions. As Selbie has written, "More than most Independents of his time [Owen] believed in a certain credal uniformity, and refused to follow Cromwell all the way in his policy of toleration."[2] He remained a rigidly orthodox Calvinist and displayed that horror of Arminianism, Socinianism, and Catholicism which prevented conservative thought from contributing notably to the development of religious toleration. Owen's thought remained that of an Independent conservative of the period of the *Apologeticall Narration*; his views show very slight enlargement during the Commonwealth and Protectorate when he must be regarded, so far as religious toleration is concerned, as without great significance.

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[1] [Owen, J., and Cotton, J.], *A defence of Mr. John Cotton from the imputation of self contradiction* (L., 1658), 65–67.

[2] Selbie, *Congregationalism*, 87.

We have previously indicated that when some measure of toleration was achieved under the Cromwellian settlement of religion, Independency began to dissolve into its constituent elements. Owen was the leader of the Congregational core of Independency which remained conservative in doctrine and which viewed with mounting horror the lay and sectarian alliances into which it had been forced in the critical days of the Civil War. This group made a sustained effort during the closing years of Cromwell's administration to throw off its sectarian connections and to seek with moderate Presbyterianism fusion in a State Church, based upon "fundamentals of faith," which should be moderately Calvinistic in doctrine and which should undertake to restrain eccentric sectarianism and scepticism by a substantial limitation of the wide tolerance of the Cromwellian Government. Owen was the leading ecclesiastical statesman of this movement which men as widely separated as Cromwell and Baxter properly regarded as inimical to the religious liberty which then appertained in England. Owen's theory was, therefore, warped to the exigencies of circumstance. His thought remained vague, unordered, and thin until the Restoration.[1] He really desired a prudently orthodox religious settlement of a National Church which would extend religious liberty no farther than the confines of the Calvinistic communions, and his occasionally warm defence of religious toleration was strictly conditioned by this constant element in his shifting thought.

Owen vigorously defended the Congregational view of the right of private judgment in religious affairs. A repressive ecclesiastical authority forces the spiritual instinct into a rigid mould which stifles the very possibility of religious growth. In England many clashing parties seek spiritual pre-eminence without reflecting that the triumph of one would occasion the destruction of the others. If all pious men were asked what religious order they would prefer if their own could not prevail, they would all regard it as desirable "that the people of God be delivered from the hands of their cruell enemies, that they may serve the Lord without feare all the days of their lives, in righteousnesse and holinesse, that notwithstanding their present differences, they may live peacably one with, or at least one by another," protected against a recurrence of persecution.[1] In this common persuasion the hope of the Reformation in England resides. For the first time men may freely seek God in their own way, without fear that Christians will devour each other with persecution and oppression.[2] The godly need have no apprehension that the variety of opinions and the harsh disagreements of the clergy which pervade the Church will be destructive to true faith. Owen exhibited the Puritan's confidence in the power of truth to prevail if the private judgment were left unmolested.[3] He summoned men to "do but your own duty, and this trouble is at an end." For men must seek God in their own way and discover saving truth in the Bible. Faith comes as the consequence of the free enquiry and search of the individual; it may not be gained at the command of authority.[4] Truth is attained as the reward of patient and thoughtful investigation in which the mind must be kept free of party animus and sectarian bigotry. Our convictions must be seated in the mind and heart, fortified by the immediacy of our relations with God.[5]

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[1] It should be understood that our consideration of Owen's thought is strictly limited to his works published prior to the Restoration. After the collapse of the plan looking forward to a comprehensive religious settlement, his thought on the subject of religious toleration underwent considerable enlargement and achieved a greater maturity.

The violent and incessant religious controversies which wracked England in this period deeply distressed the spirits of men like Owen who desired order and conciliation above all else. Owen was firm in his conviction that angry disputation and strife bred a charged atmosphere in which compromise and understanding could not be attained. The Reformation, he held, could not be completed in England until men assessed the religious problem in a spirit of moderation and charity. The language of discussion has become loose and violent.[1] The root of this intolerance is to be discovered in the instinct of men who have received certain opinions to measure all truth in the light of their own subjective principles. "Old bounds must not be broken up; order must not be disturbed; let God appear never so imminently, so mightily. . . ."[2] The differences which disturb the Church are magnified and distorted into schism. "Our little differences may be met at every stall, and in too many pulpits, swelled by unbefitting expressions, into such a formidable bulk, as poor creatures are even startled at their horrid looks and appearance."[3] Christians appear more resolute in the exploitation of their differences than with the cultivation of their common religious life.[4] All perspective has been lost; men elevate their peculiar glosses into infallible doctrinal systems; and every party contends for the complete vindication of its own arrogant pretensions. Those who differ from us become in the very fact of difference sectaries and heretics, by the measure of our own infallible pretensions.[5] Men forget that they too have been persecuted, and "those names which men are known by, when they are oppressed, they commonly use against others whom they seek to oppresse."[6] The sinful arrogance with which faction is instinct has made of Christianity a theatre of bloodshed and persecution.

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[1] Owen, John, *God's work in founding Zion, and His peoples duty thereupon, etc.* (Oxford, 1656), 36–37.

[2] *Ibid.*, 31 (mispaged).

[3] Freund, *Die Idee der Toleranz*, 128–129.

[4] Owen, John, *The duty of pastors and people distinguished, &c.* (L., 1643), *Works*, XIX, 50.

[5] Owen, John, *Vindiciae evangelicae or the mystery of the gospell vindicated and Socinianisme examined, etc.* (L., 1655), Pref., 68–69.

Owen disliked intensely the arrogant claim of infallibility which at once destroyed private judgment and made the Church the pawn of political accident. Faith can be sustained and the Church settled only when order, compromise, and charity are maintained and when discussion is undergirded by an enquiring, patient, and reasonable spirit. The iniquitous assumption of infallibility rests upon fraudulent and irreligious grounds. He reminded England that Protestantism had disclaimed the spurious infallibility of the Church of Rome, yet it had displayed a steady tendency to revert to the most grievous of the Roman errors. Protestants must reflect that "it is a most difficult thing to determine of heresy; with an assurance, that they are so out of danger of erring, in that determination, as to make it a ground of rigorous proceedings" against those regarded as heretical. The essentials of faith are clearly outlined in the Bible and on these matters there is but little dispute. The Church has been torn with dissension concerning uncertain matters about which imperious men have sought to rule categorically with the whip of persecution in their hands. No man can thus order the Church until he first discloses the basis for his infallible knowledge.[1]

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[1] Owen, John, *A short defensative about church government, toleration and petitions about these things.* [*Followed by*] *a countrey essay for the practice of church-government there* (L., 1646), 48.

[2] Owen, John, *The advantage of the kingdom of Christ in the shaking of the kingdoms of this world, etc.* (Oxford, 1651), *Works*, XV, 437; *Works*, XVI, 19–20.

[3] Owen, *A short defensative*, 49.

[4] Owen, John, *Eschol, a cluster of the fruit of Canaan* (L., 1648), *Works*, XIX, Pref.

[5] Owen, *A short defensative*, 49, 52–53.

[6] *Ibid.*, 53.

Charity forbids and reason prohibits the punishment of men for the simple offence of disagreement. Those who seek authority to persecute have always confused the processes of civil law with those of the spiritual order. Civil crimes are absolute and determinable, while spiritual error is elusive, undefinable, and shadowed by our own uncertainty. The doctrine of persecution has laid waste the Church and has stunted the development of our knowledge. Persecution was "the engine that for many generations kept truth in corners."[2] It surrenders the Church to the strongest and plunges Christendom into a "very theatre of bloody murders, killing, slaying, imprisoning men round in a compasse."[3] Protestantism can never attain its full stature until this bloody principle has been driven from Christian thinking.

Owen recommended the acceptance in England of the principle of religious toleration, limited, as we shall notice later, in several important respects. Religious toleration, he maintained, is dictated both by the nature of the Christian religion and by the fact of deep-seated religious diversity in England. The kingdom of Christ cannot be attained by the arm of flesh nor by the "sword of man setting up a few to rule over others."[4]

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[1] Owen, *A short defensative*, 72–73. [2] *Ibid.*, 75. [3] *Ibid.*, 76.

[4] Owen, John, *Sermon . . . Concerning the kingdome of Christ, and the power of the civile magistrate about the things of the worship of God* (Oxford, 1652), 19 (mispaged throughout).

The civil authority is charged with the encouragement of religion, but this gives it no sanction to "set up formes of government, to compell men to come under the line of them, or to think in your sword to cutt the lesser differences of brethren."[1] Parliament must exercise scrupulous care to avoid the confounding of heavenly and earthly things. The State possesses no power to punish those men who will not yield to the majority persuasion which will be deemed orthodox.[2] Owen sternly reminded his readers that "no false religion ever yet in the world did enthrone itself in the minds of men, enjoying a civil sovereignty over the persons of others," without seeking to extirpate contrary religious persuasions.[3] The authority of the State has been perverted to the ends of persecution and bigotry. The magistrate is required to do no more in the service of the Church than to maintain peace, order, and the rule of law so "the worshippers of God in Christ, may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godlinesse and honesty."[4] For too long the Christian Church has armed itself with a vicious persecuting power which it inherited from paganism; indeed, the annal of Christianity has been stained with even greater bloodshed than has the history of paganism.[5]

Not only has this brutal slaughter of men and women under the pretext of holy zeal been impious and unchristian, but it has likewise been ineffective in the accomplishment even of its professed aim. Owen held that history afforded no instance of the extirpation of an heresy by force. Christianity has been seized by a mad delusion in the brutality of its persecuting zeal. Balance, discrimination, and charity have been engulfed by the floods of fanaticism. Truth has consistently suffered greater pains than heresy. All sects and all creeds have shared in the shame of the persecuting mania. This characteristic sin of the Roman Church has been absorbed by the Protestants, who

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[1] Owen, John, *Sermon . . . Concerning the kingdome of Christ, and the power of the civile magistrate about the things of the worship of God* (Oxford, 1652), 37 (mispaged throughout).

[2] Owen, John, *Righteous zeal encouraged by divine protection: with a discourse about toleration, and the duty of the civil magistrate about religion, thereunto annexed* (L., 1649), *Works*, XV, 212.

[3] *Ibid.*, XV, 212–213.

[4] Owen, *Sermon . . . Concerning the kingdome of Christ*, 51.

[5] Owen, *Righteous zeal*, *Works*, XV, 219.

"use no other arguments, cite no other texts, press no other consequences for the punishing of other heretics, than the papists, the wisest heretics breathing, do for the punishment of us."[1] Owen gloomily reflected that the Church has been at peace and reasonably free of error only in those ages when it was too weak to employ physical violence against heresy.

The roots of the persecuting philosophy were laid bare by the fine zeal and penetrating examination of Owen's logic. The Church must eschew all coercion, whether by its own hand or by that of the State which it declares its hangman. Let no man delude himself into the view that heresy may be exterminated by physical torments. Ecclesiastical unity and disciplinary precision are eminently desirable but they must not be purchased with the coin of true religion. The Roman Church is a classical example of the formal and dead unity which persecution attains.[2] The Church must build its habitation out of better timbers than those found in the ruins of paganism and Romanism. An intolerance based upon fear cannot provide it with secure foundations. No power has been vested in the clergy or in the magistrate for the punishment of error, and it is a singular doctrine indeed which entrusts the civil ruler with the final and awful responsibility of choosing between truth and error. "View the times that are past," Owen demanded, "consult the stories of former ages, take a catalogue of the kings and rulers that have been, since first magistrates outwardly embraced Christian religion in this and other nations, where the gospel hath been planted; and ask your consciences whether these be the men, to whom this high trust in the house of God is committed?"[3] The philosophy of persecution must be condemned as "the most pernicious invention that ever was broached." It has been a double-edged sword destroying the true and the false alike. Indeed, "where one man hath suffered for an error, under the name of an heretike, five hundred under the same notion have suffered for truth."[4] Error has been advanced and perpetuated by the very machinery devised for its extermination. The Church must put aside completely and forever the bloody mantle of persecution which has so long enshrouded it.

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[1] Owen, *Righteous zeal*, *Works*, XV, 224.

[2] Owen, *A short defensative*, 64–65.

[3] Owen, *Righteous zeal*, *Works*, XV, 247.

[4] Owen, *A short defensative*, 77.

The Church has so long been enmeshed in the philosophy of persecution that it will have to consider carefully and prayerfully the content of the philosophy of charity and toleration which must succeed it. This is especially true in England, where an ecclesiastical tyranny, only recently destroyed, has been supplanted by a species of spiritual anarchy. The motives and pretensions of all groups must be carefully examined. In particular, Owen warned his readers, "the pleaders of each side, have their interest in the cause. I never knew one contend earnestly for a toleration of dissenters, but was so himself: nor any for their suppression, but were themselves of the persuasion which prevaileth."[1] The limits of toleration must be carefully and thoughtfully determined. Perhaps the initial assumption, Owen would seem to suggest, must be that no man should be put to death for sectarianism or heresy.[2] He who thinks otherwise may "go kill pagans and Mahometans."[3] But this primary postulate settles very little. England must address herself to a clear definition of the toleration which Christian charity may extend and to an exact statement of those spiritual offences which the Christian State and Church cannot permit to flourish unrestrained.

Owen laboured earnestly during the period of the Commonwealth and Protectorate to define the limits which the Christian State must set for the toleration of eccentric religious opinions. In an earlier connection we have commented on his work as the moving spirit in the Committee for the Propagation of the Gospel, where as an ecclesiastical statesman he sought to persuade Parliament to accept an imposing list of "fundamentals" which his Committee had drafted.[4] We have observed that this effort, which was to be a topic for warm debate from 1652 to 1654, represented a point of view considerably less tolerant than that which the Government was endeavouring to administer. Owen's interest in the fundamentals of faith was predominant in his thinking as early as 1649,[1] and Baxter has testified to his influence upon conservative Congregational thought during the succeeding decade.[2] In successive pamphlets Owen pursued a line of enquiry that had fascinated liberal thinkers since the days of Acontius. Unfortunately, however, Owen was no Latitudinarian; his conception of essential doctrine remained rather rigidly Calvinistic, failing to embrace large sections of English religious thought upon whose support the very stability of the State depended.

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[1] Owen, *A short defensative*, 65.

[2] *Ibid.*, 66–67.

[3] Owen, J., *A complete collection of the sermons, etc.* (L., 1721), 229.

[4] *Vide ante*, 140–143, 247 ff.

Owen's consideration of this important question is marred by a kind of vague evasion. The exercise of Roman Catholic and Socinian worship cannot be tolerated by the Christian State. The Roman Church cannot be regarded as a true Church since it destroys the foundations of faith in so many important respects.[3] Moreover, its policy is fatal to the interests of the civil State, and hence it is not worthy of toleration.[4] Writing in 1649, Owen was apparently of the opinion that the Bible provided the Church with no warrant for the physical punishment of idolaters and blasphemers,[5] though later in the same work he recommended the coercive restraint of blasphemers who persisted in spreading their impious views.[6] In so far as these offences contravene social and moral codes they must be vigorously repressed. Owen condoned the "zeale" of the orthodox who put Servetus to death,[7] and it should be recalled that this tragic incident was for a century and a half sharply to divide the liberal from the illiberal. Writing in 1659, Owen exhibited less reserve on the question of the punishment of blasphemy and idolatry. He there expressed the opinion that the responsibility placed upon the magistrate by the Old Testament for the suppression of these enormities had never been revoked.[8] This position is likewise supported by the law of nature and by the requirements of reforming the Church.

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[1] Owen, *Righteous zeal*, *Works*, XV, 247 ff.

[2] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, II, 199.

[3] Owen, John, *Of schism. The true nature of it discovered and considered, etc.* (Oxford, 1657), *Works*, XIX, 189.

[4] Owen, *Righteous zeal*, *Works*, XV, 202.

[5] *Ibid.*, XV, 204–206.

[6] *Ibid.*, XV, 241.

[7] Owen, *Vindiciae evangelicae*, Pref., 44.

[8] Owen, John, *Two questions concerning the power of the supreme magistrate about religion and the worship of God, with one about tithes proposed and resolved* (L., 1659), *Works*, XIV, 387.

Owen showed greater liberality on the question of the policy which should be assumed towards heresy and error in the fundamentals, as defined by Owen, though in this connection too his thought displays striking instability. In his first great work (1649) he warmly maintained that heresy was a spiritual offence which could be punished by none other than spiritual weapons.[1] This is not to say, however, that heretical sects may be tolerated in the Christian State. They should not be extended liberty of worship; disorderly conduct by their members should be sharply curbed.[2] Owen, it has been alleged, held this opinion with more than theoretical zeal, since he permitted the whipping of two Quaker women at Oxford who had created a disturbance during divine services.[3] Religious toleration must not be permitted to degenerate into religious licence.[4] Christians cannot connive at heresies or sects which outrage the fundamentals of faith.[5] Such erroneous persons must be cut off from the Church, and their conduct should be carefully restrained by the civil power.[6] Religious error enjoys no claim to protection or liberty. Those who are afflicted with heresy should not be repressed by the State "so long as they keep their opinions to themselves, but they have no right to propagate them at their pleasure."[7]

Owen's tolerance, though resting upon broad and liberal foundations, was in point of fact strictly and rigorously limited when he sought to give it application in the revolutionary period. He was deeply shocked by the spreading sectarianism and secularism of his age and could not bend a rigidly orthodox doctrinal point of view sufficiently to contribute notably to the solution of the problem of religious dissent. Owen would have outlawed Catholicism and Socinianism upon religious grounds, Quakerism and radical sectarianism for both religious and civil reasons. He would apparently have restrained blasphemy and idolatry by rigorous repression. To those other religious communions whose antecedents were not Calvinistic, Owen would extend a liberty of belief, but he would not permit them to enjoy freedom of worship or preaching. This solution was in fact considerably less tolerant than the Elizabethan Settlement of religion because it was predicated upon an Establishment whose limits were substantially less comprehensive and elastic. Owen, and the conservative Independent group of which he was the intellectual leader, made but slight contribution to the development of religious toleration.

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[1] "The spiritual sword of discipline" is the weapon of the Church, and by it alone heresy is dispelled. (Owen, *Righteous zeal*, *Works*, XV, 209.)

[2] *Ibid.*, XV, 239.

[3] Gough, John, *A History of the People called Quakers* (Dublin, 1789–1790), I, 147–149.

[4] Owen, *A short defensative*, 68.

[5] *Ibid.*, 69.

[6] *Ibid.*, 70–71.

[7] Owen, *Sermon . . . Concerning the kingdome of Christ.*

II. The savoy declaration, 1658

Owen had exercised great influence in the desperate effort of the conservative Independents to dissolve the coalition which had submerged Congregationalism in the critical years when Presbyterianism had threatened all dissent in England. Directly this danger was removed, Congregationalism began to stir restlessly in its association with radical sectarianism and to display its traditional conservatism on the question of religious liberty. These influences resulted in 1658 in the convention of the Savoy Conference where, despite Cromwell's apprehensions, the task of defining precisely and authoritatively the theology and the government of the Congregational churches was undertaken. Rather more than two hundred delegates attended the sessions, but the delicate assignment of drafting the Confession was entrusted to Owen, Nye, Bridge, Caryl, Greenhill, and Thomas Goodwin. The committee, which was dominated by Owen, sought to emphasize the disparity between Congregationalism and its former allies and to seek a basis of union with moderate Presbyterianism.[1] The Savoy Declaration marks the end of Independency as a vital political and religious force; this remarkable coalition was speedily dissolved into its

[1] *Vide ante*, 246 ff., for a fuller discussion of this development. Lewis du Moulin, writing in 1659, further emphasized this disposition. He suggested that no religion should be tolerated which did not agree with the Westminster Confession or the Savoy Declaration (*Proposals and reasons whereon some of them are grounded, etc.* (L., 1659), 5). Presbyterianism and Congregationalism can be joined in a loose National Church which should enjoy the exclusive assistance and protection of the magistrate. Apparently du Moulin would tolerate other communions so long as they worshipped quietly and privately, but they should enjoy no legal status.

elements. The fruits of power and the nostalgia for the ancient conception of the State Church had effectively destroyed the influence which Congregationalism might have utilized to rear the establishment of religious liberty upon foundations strong enough to survive the storm of the Restoration.

In the apology with which the authors prefaced the Confession they disclaimed any desire to impose by force still another system of dogma upon the human conscience.[1] They submitted that there ought to be mutual tolerance and forbearance between the "saints of all persuasions,"[2] so long as the fundamental tenets of Christianity were not violated. They pleaded for tolerance in indifferent matters but specifically denied their willingness to tolerate errors which were by definition contrary to the foundations of faith. Those Churches which adhere to the essentials of faith should have complete liberty of worship and organization.[3] In particular, the authors recommended a close association with the Presbyterians, whose differences were those of "fellow servants."[4]

The Confession stated the case of religious toleration and liberty of conscience in terms so conservative that they did no violence to moderate Presbyterian theory. The document was carefully worded and betrays Owen's chronic disposition to hedge and trim—that which the right hand extended the left hand took away. God was declared the sole lord of conscience and His truth the only guide for men. To obey or to believe contrary to the persuasion of conscience betrays our liberty, while "the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blinde obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also."[5] But this does not permit the practice of sin or lust under the pretence of liberty of conscience. Nor does it permit the open countenancing of blasphemy and error. The magistrate must tolerate such errors in faith as do not contravene the fundamentals, while taking care "that men of corrupt mindes and conversations do not licentiously publish and divulge blasphemy and errors in their own nature, subverting the faith, and inevitably destroying the souls of them that receive them."[1]

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[1] *A declaration of the faith and order owned and practised in the Congregational churches in England; agreed upon and consented unto by their elders and messengers in their meeting at the Savoy, October* 12, 1658 (L., 1658), in Walker, Williston, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (N.Y., 1893), 355.

[2] *Ibid.*, 357.

[3] *Ibid.*, 364.

[4] *Ibid.*, 366–367.

[5] *Ibid.*, 389.

The Savoy Declaration was the considered statement of English Congregationalism on the troubled questions of religious toleration and freedom of conscience. It is evident that the communion in its earnest desire to dissociate itself from its radical allies had done grave disservice to the development of religious liberty in England. Independency had gained power in the nation. The greatest fruit of its victory had been the defeat of ecclesiastical bigotry and the confirmation of the view that religious liberty need not fatally undermine the fabric of civil and spiritual life. Congregationalism had been but one element within Independency; it now displayed an arrogant desire to assess the sectarian victory in its own limited terms. Had Cromwell lived longer he might well have found it necessary to prick the bubble of Congregational pretensions as decisively as the army had deflated the intransigence of Presbyterianism a decade earlier.

12. MINOR INDEPENDENT THINKERS, 1640–1660

There is extant a vast body of Independent literature reflecting accurately the development of the views of the coalition on the subject of toleration. We have endeavoured to deal with some thoroughness with the thought of a number of significant intellectual leaders who display the relatively complex body of opinion which may be said to comprise Independency. It will now be well to examine briefly the thought of minor and anonymous writers, seeking to select from the huge *corpus* of this material titles which fairly represent the evolution of Independent thought. It is not without significance that of the seventy-two titles employed for this study no less than fifty-four were written in the period (prior to 1649) when Independency was waging a defensive struggle against the demands of Presbyterian orthodoxy. Moreover, all but six of the titles cited appeared prior to Owen's final submission of the list of fundamentals to Parliament in 1654. In other words, Independency began to disintegrate directly a tolerable degree of religious liberty had been achieved in England. Prior to 1649 Independency waged the war for religious toleration in England; in the following decade the leadership passed to the radical sectaries and to the laymen.

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[1] *A declaration of the faith and order*, in Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 393.

a. Denunciation of Exclusive Truth and Pretensions of Infallibility

The minor Independent theorists were firm in their denial that any ecclesiastical system could claim exclusive and infallible authority in religion. They bitterly assailed the Presbyterians, who, they contended, had pleaded zealously before the Civil War for religious liberty. But with the overthrow of ecclesiastical tyranny the orthodox will "not rest satisfied with being free as their brethren, but become restlesse in their contrivances and endeavours, till they become lords over us."[1] In the Assembly they have devised a structure of doctrine and discipline which imposes grievous tyranny upon the Christian conscience and recommends violence as the instrument of persuasion.[2] They have sought to bind the State to the execution of their imperious will,[3] which they would impose by "imprisonment, mulcts, terrours, or threats" to the destruction of men's souls.[4] They have posed a solution to the problem of dissent which threatens the stability of the State and the very existence of religion. "Look abroad, and nothing troubles men more than to think whether the presbytery shall be set up *jure divino*" to the consequent ruin of Church and State.[5] Presbyterianism depends for the sanction of its power upon the thinly disguised arm of an hideous persecution, while Independency conceives of the Church as a purely spiritual entity.[1] The Independents recognize that men differ irreconcilably in their opinions and beliefs. They propose no solution of arbitrary power and force of arms, but hold that Christians should "peaceably beare one with another, till our sights grow better, and our light increase."[2]

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[1] *Tolleration justified, and persecution condemn'd, in an answer or examination, of the London-ministers letter. Whereof, many of them are of the synod, and yet framed this letter at Sion-Colledge, etc.* (L., 1646), 1.

[2] Parker, William, *The late Assembly of Divines confession of faith examined, etc.* (L., 1651), 228.

[3] [Robinson, Henry], *The falsehood of Mr. William Pryn's Truth Triumphing, in the antiquity of popish princes and parliaments, etc.* (L., 1645), Epist.; *The tender conscience religiously affected propounding questions of weighty consequence, and tender consideration* (L., 1646), 2–16.

[4] Parker, *The late Assembly of Divines confession of faith examined*, 228–229.

[5] Nye, Philip, *Speech in Assembly of Divines* (February 21, 1644), in Lightfoot, *Journals*, *Works*, XIII, 168–169.

The Independents in their attack upon exclusive spiritual authority stressed the doctrine of complete individualism and of unfettered private judgment. God has made man in His own image, while Presbyterian tyranny proposes to reduce him to the level of the beasts. No power over conscience has been given by God to any man or to any earthly authority. Even if such a power is bestowed upon the godly by false interpretation of the scripture, they cannot fail to sin dangerously through exercising it for the compulsion of "all the world unto their uniformity; and so infallibly produce the most cursed enmity betwixt all people but differing in opinion."[3] Religious ills can be cured by none other than spiritual means. The ultimate authority in finding and interpreting God's truth is the individual Christian who possesses all of the guidance which a synod or a Parliament enjoys for determining between truth and error. "Adversaries certainly are not competent judges; againe, in matters disputable and controverted, every man must examine for himselfe, and so every man does, or else he must be conscious to himselfe, that he sees with other mens eyes, and has taken up an opinion, not because it contents with his understanding, but for that it is the safest and least troublesome as the world goes. . . ."[4] We cannot hang our salvation upon the peg of an external authority.

It may be true in theory that the Christian State should not permit the dissemination of opinions which contravene the laws of nature and the light of religious truth. But, unfortunately, we possess no certain and infallible means for determining between truth and error. All persecutors presume that they are competent to judge in these matters, and upon this rock the structure of persecution has been built.[1] Nor can this power be entrusted to the civil authority, which in England has vacillated between popery and Protestantism and which may easily do so again.[2] That party becomes orthodox which enjoys the favour of the magistracy, and religious truth is determined by the strange expedient of majority vote or by sheer power.[3] These means will not suffice for the kingdom of God. No man can be won to conformity before his reason is persuaded; no man can gain knowledge of God until he has found truth by seeking it freely and patiently. All men who "walk obediently towards those that are in places of rule and authority, and live a godly, honest, sober, peaceable, and unblamable life," must be granted complete liberty of conscience and of worship.[4] The pernicious doctrine of exclusive truth has for too long laid waste the religious conscience and has by grievous and insupportable persecutions distorted and warped the tender charity which is the essence of Christian faith.

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[1] *The case of the kingdom stated, according to the proper interests of the several parties engaged, etc.* (L., 1647), in Hanbury, *Historical Memorials*, III, 232.

[2] *Tolleration justified*, 3.

[3] [Robinson], *The falsehood of Mr. William Pryn's Truth Triumphing*, 19.

[4] *Tolleration justified*, 3.

The severe strictures which the minor Independent writers laid against the Presbyterian ecclesiastical pretensions committed the party, even if it had not been inspired by genuine devotion to religious toleration, to a moderate and tolerant policy. The Independents convinced England in the decade which closed in 1650 that an exclusive church system supported by repressive agencies would result in the restoration of an ecclesiastical tyranny quite as grievous as that recently destroyed. The Independent theorists hotly maintained that the religious structure framed at Westminster was calculated to spill the blood of thousands of saints, to introduce "a new fury of persecutions more high than ever," and to impose "a more than antichristian yoak upon the necks of believers."[5] The orthodox have claimed "as lardge and greater power over the consyences of saints" as that ever maintained by the bishops.[6] Every man who has dared oppose their fanatical zeal has been damned as an heretic by the authority of their awful arrogance. While prating of liberty of conscience they have prepared the rack for dissent,[1] and in their impious insistence upon a *jure divino* power they have all but plunged the nation into renewed wars.[2]

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[1] *Tolleration justified*, 3 ff.

[2] [Robinson], *The falsehood of Mr. William Pryn's Truth Triumphing*, 26.

[3] *Ibid.*, 19–20, 27–28.

[4] Parker, *The late Assembly of Divines confession of faith examined*, 230.

[5] *True state of the case of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and the Dominions thereunto belonging, etc.* (L., 1654), 14.

[6] *Hinckman to Cromwell, November, 1650*, Nickolls, *Original Letters and Papers of State*, 30.

Under the protection of obscurity or of anonymity the minor Independent theorists did great service to the cause of toleration by their vigorous and sustained attack upon the exclusivism which lay at the centre of the Presbyterian theory of church organization. They had vindicated the right of private judgment in virile pamphlets and had destroyed the *raison d'être* of persecution by the effective denial that any human power can distinguish infallibly between truth and error. They did not realize that religious liberty and spiritual anarchy are the necessary corollaries of this position. Again it had been demonstrated that one of the most fruitful sources of tolerance is the denial upon reasonable and religious grounds of the sources of the authority which seeks a warrant for persecution.

b. Denunciation of Spiritual Coercion and Persecution

These influences led the Independent writers to an unequivocal denial of the validity of all religious coercion and persecution. All our evidence would indicate that in the harassed period under survey the mass of English opinion, whether political or religious, became for the first time in the history of the nation persuaded that religious persecution was both wrong and futile. Toleration does not flow immediately or directly from this essentially negative conviction, but it follows inevitably once the State and Christian philosophy have adjusted themselves to the momentous implications of a shattered catholicity.

The Independent thinkers argued eloquently that the reformation of religion in England must scrupulously avoid the repressive philosophy which had marred Anglicanism and which had provoked persecution and civil war. Sidrach Simpson,[1] speaking before the House of Commons in 1643, warned the members against binding men too closely in the toils of law. Religion cannot be undergirded by coercive laws which breed an iniquitous repression of conscience.[2] The Independents, another writer maintained, could not without mortal violence to their own philosophy persecute other sects if they should gain power.[3] The State should be most wary of extending its support to those factions that gird themselves with the sword of religious repression. The writer warned England that the persecuting spirit was the "greatest enemy to humane society, the dissolver of love and brotherly affection, the cause of envyings, heart-burnings, divisions, yea, and of warres it selfe."[4] In all history no other influence has been so destructive of civil order and human happiness as this scourge of the priests. The magistrate should regard it as his most subtle enemy and destroy it in the interests of the State. England should rise to exterminate this mortal danger to religious freedom and political stability in the knowledge that no exclusive Establishment can be reared "without the assistance of this fury and pestilent enemy to mankind, persecution."

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[1] *True state of the case of the Commonwealth*, 15–16.

[2] *Hinckman to Cromwell, November, 1650*, Nickolls, *Original Letters and Papers of State*, 30.

The orthodox have ever supported their intolerant authority by the plea that they sought to prevent the decay of religion before the assaults of unrestrained heresy and error. They have argued in effect that spiritual ills could be cured by physical pains. These men should vent their rage upon the pagans and the Moslems. Heresy is a cancer on the body of faith, but it is a spiritual disease: "Let it be prevented by spirituall meanes:

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[1] Sidrach Simpson (1600?–1655) was educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He preached in London for some years until Laud's disapproval of his nonconformist views forced him to leave England in 1638. He was associated with Bridge for some time in the English church at Rotterdam, but following a disagreement with his colleague he separated to form an Independent congregation in the same city. He returned in 1641 to London, where as a member of the Westminster Assembly he sturdily opposed the Presbyterian Establishment. He was made master of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, in 1650. Though he was an outspoken advocate of religious toleration, his contribution to thought in this particular was but slight.

[2] Simpson, Sidrach, *Reformation's preservation, etc.* (L., 1643), 13–16.

[3] *Tolleration justified*, 6–7.

[4] *Ibid.*, 7.

cutting off mens heads is no proper remedy for it."[1] Repressive authority invades an area which God has reserved to Himself. For too long it has sought to rule arbitrarily where God has left men free.[2] It has sought to press men into "one minde and judgement in all the matters of religion" when God has expressly forewarned us of inevitable diversity of faith.[3] It is "proper only to God, to convert and change the minds and consciences of men, and not in the power of any creature, and therefore . . . they incroach on God's prerogative" in constraining men where God has left them free.[4] England must destroy forever the oppression which has been laid for so long on the conscience of the nation. Parliament must seek to order a settlement in religion which will free men of the yoke of persecution, which is the greatest of all oppressions.[5] This settlement must be based upon the axiom that none but spiritual means will be employed in the struggle with heresy and error. Persecution can accomplish nothing more than to force men to the awful sin of hypocrisy. Outward violence may produce the appearance of uniformity of belief, but it is completely powerless to change the minds and hearts of men.[1] By these means heresy is driven underground and those who are persecuted gain the accolade of martyrdom. "There is more hurt a thousand times done, then good by such violent wayes of compulsion."[2] The truly Christian Church will renounce without reserve the weapons of persecution and will seek to win men to the knowledge of Christ by the means which He has left at its disposal.

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[1] Bartlet, *'Ιχνογραφία. Or a model of the primitive congregational way*, 26–27. William Bartlet (1610?–1682) was educated at Oxford. He became a minister at Wapping in 1647 and two years later was appointed a lecturer at Bideford. According to Calamy he was "congregational in his judgment, but loved peace with his brethren." (Calamy, *The Non-Conformists Memorial*, I, 339.) He was deprived at the Restoration but continued to preach to private conventicles. He was licensed to preach in 1672 on the occasion of the Declaration of Indulgence. (Turner, E. L., *Original Records of Early Nonconformity* (L., 1911), 1183.)

[2] Downing, Calybute, *Considerations toward a peaceable reformation in matters ecclesiasticall, etc.* (L., 1641), 8.

[3] *Certain additionall reasons to those presented in a letter by the ministers of London to the Assembly of Divines at Westminster*, 1 *Jan.* 1645 [1646]. *Of like power and force against the toleration of Independency, etc.* (L., 1645/1646), 6.

[4] Bartlet, *'Ιχνογραφία. Or a model of the primitive congregational way*, 128–129.

[5] Caryl, Joseph, *Heaven and earth embracing : or, God and man approaching, etc.* (L., 1646), 9–10. Joseph Caryl (1602–1673) was a member of a gentle London family. After his graduation from Exeter College, Oxford, he became a preacher in the capital. As a member of the Assembly he pleaded the cause of moderate Independency and as a preacher in the city and before Parliament he exercised a large influence. He was appointed minister of the church of Saint Magnus, London, in 1645 and with Marshall sought to arrive at an understanding with the king on religious affairs in the conversations at Holmby House. Caryl was one of the most learned of the Independent divines, being especially renowned for his great biblical commentary. He was deprived at the Restoration. A man of moderate and retiring temper, Caryl avoided entering into the bitter controversy over religious toleration.

c. The Problem of Heresy and Error

The minor Independent writers were deliberately sapping the foundations of the spiritual authority claimed by the Presbyterians. However, their arguments were couched in terms of universals and were of great importance in convincing England that religious toleration alone provided a solution to the impasse which rival and clashing bigotries had created. Nor did these thinkers shrink when they considered the attitude which the Christian State should properly assume towards admitted and grievous heresy in the fundamentals of faith. This question provides in the seventeenth century the infallible standard against which the appearance of tolerance may be measured.

The more advanced Independent theorists held that the Church must concern itself with the major problem of how the gospel may best be propagated rather than with the negative question of how heresy may most effectively be extirpated. The Church has through all history approached this question with singular blindness. When the scriptures are left free, spiritual resources of overwhelming power are released before which heresy cannot stand. "It is impossible that the gospell should come to be preached unto all nations, if men may be questioned for matters of conscience." Heresy can be vanquished only when it is unmolested. It is impossible for the Church, however laudable its intentions, to devise penalties against heresy without, in its fallibility, incurring the awful risk of fighting against God. Heresy can do no harm to the religious man. Our faith is slight indeed if we must insulate it against those who are lost in error. Heresy cannot be subdued unless those who err may live freely amongst the godly. Every man must seek saving faith in his own way and in his own time, and the Christian Church will endeavour to grant to all men the right to choose that way which appears to them to lead to God, and to reject all others. When this liberty has been won the self-evident glory and power of truth will at last master the infection of heresy.[1]

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[1] Bartlet, *'Ιχνογραφία. Or a model of the primitive congregational way*, 131.

[2] *Ibid.*, 132.

A momentous choice, therefore, confronts England. She has destroyed one spiritual tyranny and is threatened with another quite as evil.[2] She should shrink from investing with power imperious men who announce their intention to drive error from the land by the instruments of persecution. For those whose religion persuades them to persecute "for differences of religion . . . will easily be carried on from one degree unto another" to the ruin of the Church and State. The Presbyterians have exhibited this tyrannous intention to England in the ordinance against heresies. God has given man no such power over the human soul. We have no warrant for employing the capital sentence even when heretics deny the very fundamentals of Christian faith. The habit of persecution has beclouded our vision and distorted our reason. Moderate and religious men may well regard it as the "most pernicious invention that ever was broached."[3] It has destroyed Christian charity, has paralysed the agencies of the Church, and has written Christian history in the blood of those unjustly condemned. England must turn her back on the hideous annal of persecution and seek fulness of truth and a clearer understanding of Christ's gospel in the fairer light of religious liberty.

d. On Religious Toleration

The Independent pamphleteers held that the supreme gain which England could achieve from the maelstrom of war was liberty of conscience. The great benefits which it will confer must not be sacrificed to the peremptory demands of the Presbyterians, who were themselves not long since "in the same iron yoke and furnace of affliction."[1] England must dedicate herself to the attainment and consolidation of religious liberty. Those who desire it so fervently must require Parliament to "deny us not our commodity; Christ bought our liberties for us with his blood, wee have bought them over again at your hands with our blood . . . wee have fought, and adventured purse and person upon this expectation" of enlarged liberty for the religious conscience.[2] The godly in the nation stand persuaded that all men must freely seek their own way in religion. No man gains salvation vicariously from the piety and learning of others. Religious truth can be attained only under conditions of absolute freedom. All sects, "whether Presbyters, Independents, Brownists, Antinomians, [or] Anabaptists have a like title and right to freedome, or a toleration; the title therof being not any particular of the opinion, but the equity of every mans being free in the state he lives in, and is obedient to, matters of opinion being not properly to be taken into cognisance any farther, then they break out into some disturbance, or disquiet to the state."[3] The toleration which religious freedom requires must be unrestricted. Blasphemy and serious error will yield to truth if it is not hampered by the false weapons of coercive power. In fact, "the grosser the errour is, the more advantage hath truth over it." The priceless benefits which complete liberty imparts to the Church cannot be sacrificed for an unwarranted preoccupation with heresy, which, in any case, is powerless against the convinced conscience.

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[1] [Robinson], *The falsehood of Mr. William Pryn's Truth Triumphing*, Epist.
[2] *Ibid.*, 9–10.
[3] Bartlet, *'Ιχνογραφία. Or a model of the primitive congregational way*, 26.

When toleration has been attained the issues between truth and error can at last be clearly resolved. For a millennium it has been evident that heresy cannot be vanquished by violence. "You may as well be angry, and molest a man that has an imperfection or dimnesse in his eyes, and thinke by stripes or bonds to recover his sight."[4] When men are so blind and perverse as to deny the evident truth of God, Bedlam and the

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[1] *A paraenetick, or humble addresse to the Parliament and Assembly for* (*not loose, but*) *Christian libertie* (L., 1644), 2.

[2] *Ibid.*, 5.

[3] *Tolleration justified*, 8.

[4] *Ibid.*, 8–9.

Fleet are not calculated to work a cure. Reason and patient persuasion are the sole specifics for the derangement of error. Only men of weak faith or impassioned minds would brandish the whip of persecution against error. Those whose "minds are establisht, and whose opinions are built upon firm and demonstrable grounds, care not what winds blow, fear not to grapple with any error."[1] The Church must cast off the heathen survivals which have long divided it and which have frustrated its warfare on heresy and disbelief. When it embraces the principle of complete religious liberty, the Church will again establish itself upon the strong foundations which Christ has laid.

The Church, then, has everything to gain in an atmosphere of complete freedom. It can then strive with purpose and with clear vision towards unity of the spirit. It will support all peaceable men in the liberty of their conscience, admitting that "religion is soe difficult and tender, that it is beyond man's reach, rightly to judge of it."[2] Even the Jews, whose "time is neere" at hand, will be permitted to dwell in freedom within the land. Christians will rest secure in the knowledge that men will not desert a Church which preaches the truth of God and that it is better that the Church should be filled by the power of truth than by the prescriptions of authority.[3] The Church will guard its purity by the "golden reins" of internal discipline,[4] but it will decline to "tie up all mens consciences, who profess truth in sobriety." Nor will it seek greater support from the civil magistrate than the restraint of those who "abuse their liberty to the civil injury of others," or who disturb the public peace and morality.[5] It will move forward majestically to the fulfilment of its mission, secure in the truth with which God has armed it. Men may then determine for themselves, without external pressure, between truth and error. Reason, piety, and truth will be squarely matched against the dark forces of error.[1] Whoever doubts the issue of this conflict betrays either weakness of faith or a depraved imperiousness of spirit.

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[1] *Tolleration justified*, 9.

[2] Herring, Samuel, *Mr. Samuel Herring, to the Parliament* (L., 1653), in Nickolls, *Original Letters and Papers of State*, 100.

[3] *Tolleration justified*, 9–10.

[4] The Church requires only "that each congregation have power . . . to judge those that are within themselves, of their owne members, in a church way, not medling with those who doe not joyne with them." (*Propositions to both Houses of Parliament for gathering of churches, in the behalfe of many congregations in the city of London, and other parts of the kingdome. . . . Commonly* (*but falsely*) *called Independents* (L., 1647), 5.)

[5] *True state of the case of the Commonwealth*, 43.

England must not be misled by the appeals of the orthodox for uniformity into the jaws of another persecuting Establishment. The Presbyterians have displayed a fanatical devotion to a compulsive philosophy worse than that of the bishops. An Independent writer enquired of his more orthodox colleagues, "Did you slay part of us in the field with the sword of the enemy, that you might the easier suppresse the residue at home?"[2] Neither the Presbyterians nor any other group can demonstrate scriptural authority for the design of the dead tomb of formalism which they have reared for the Church in England. They seek a uniformity implemented by the rack and stake, though Christians know that "it is as much madness, to prosecute men because they are not like us in opinion, as it were to quarrel with them when they resemble us not in outward complexion."[3] No man can aspire to greater knowledge than God grants to him. The Presbyterians pursue frantically the evil spectre of enforced uniformity in search of the devil and not in quest of Christ. The human mind must roam free and untrammelled in its quest for divine knowledge. "And as a confinement of the wind torments nature with an earthquake, so to rob the soul, which is far more agile and diffusive, of its freedom, must needs cause a cholic with inflammation in the bowels of a kingdom."[4] The "uniformity mongers" are the deadly enemies both of Church and State. Until liberty is gained, until the conscience is free, until "men be less in the letter that they may be one in the spirit . . . and until they leave crying fire from heaven against brethren in the faith," peace and dignity cannot be gained in this world.

The Church must banish from its philosophy the spirit of pride and persecution which has so stained its history. Christ has not recommended the singular remedy of killing those of

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[1] *Tolleration justified*, 10–11; [Robinson], *The falsehood of Mr. William Pryn's Truth Triumphing*, 28.

[2] *A paraenetick*, 9.

[3] *The case of the kingdom stated*, in Hanbury, *Historical Memorials*, III, 230.

[4] *Ibid.*, III, 231.

His members whom we cannot cure by our persuasions. Even nature counsels us to bear with a blemish rather than to undertake the heroic remedy of destroying the body in order to remove the imperfection which offends us.[1] Christians have been so preoccupied in pointing out the blemishes that they have ignored the unity which binds them as members of Christ. Animosity and intolerance have been fanned by proud divines who have blown "the coales of dissention, and exasperated one mans spirit against another."[2] The Church may accommodate wide differences in opinion without laying waste the catholicity which unites it. For "the Scriptures are of that latitude," another Independent theorist argued in terms of an amazing figure, "that a lamb may wade and yet an elephant swim in their ocean."[3] All men of all opinions may do good and may advance God's cause in their several places and with their several understandings. The Church secures this harmony of effort, this singular zeal for Christ, and this latitude of charity only when it possesses the precious benefits of toleration.

England will gain the peace and reformation which she so passionately desires only by embracing the principles of religious liberty. The nation has already disowned the persecution and straining of conscience which characterize popery and prelacy. But the evil inheritance of formal uniformity has lingered on in Presbyterianism and threatens once more to engulf Christian liberty. Already men are saying, "Wee must have but one religion, and hang them, and draw them, and banish them."[4] The factional bigotry of warring orthodoxies seeks to "tie little knots and quirks" upon the Christian conscience. Truth can never be discovered in the rigid uniformity which orthodoxy requires. The solution of the religious dilemma in England must be taken from the hands of the clergy, who seek the aggrandizement of their own interests; it must be entrusted to those who without passion or factional zeal "enquire for truth, for truths sake, and the satisfaction of their own mindes."[5]

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[1] *A paraenetick*, 11.

[2] *Tolleration justified*, 12.

[3] L., W., *The Independents military entertainment, etc.* (L., 1645), no pagin.

[4] Cradock, Walter, *Gospel-libertie, in the extensions [and] limitations of it, etc.* (L., 1648), 49.

[5] *Tolleration justified*, 15.

Religion has too long been the prey of selfish and imperious men who have sought to perpetuate their own fallible interests by a persecuting philosophy resting upon specious and irreligious pretensions of infallibility. Religion must be returned to the people, and the needless divisions which pride and avarice have created must be healed by the balm of common sense and lay charity. Factionalism has proceeded so far and so destructively that religious toleration must be embraced if the Christian Church is not to perish.

13. SUMMARY

Independency did its work in a brief but momentous period of fifteen years. It was a movement of remarkable complexity and of singular effectiveness, engendered as a broad coalition of defence against the mounting bigotry of Presbyterian demands. At the height of the religious crisis Independency came to include diverse radical forces which engulfed the conservative Congregational core of the movement to identify it with principles and causes which did no slight violence to the conservative Calvinism of Congregationalism. This radical leadership, having secured the support of lay and sectarian thought against the possibility of a classical Genevan Establishment, undertook with great skill the larger task in the period of the Commonwealth and Protectorate of evolving a positive philosophy of religious liberty. The inevitable consequence of this development was the sloughing off of the conservative Congregational wing of the movement which had viewed with pious and restless apprehension the shoals of spiritual freedom and anarchy into which the resolute and reckless leadership of the movement was guiding it. The Savoy Declaration was Congregationalism's declaration of independence. Secure, or apparently secure, within the framework of the Cromwellian Settlement, Congregationalism reasserted its identity in order to seek reconciliation with moderate Presbyterianism, whose doctrine was immaculate and whose jibes directed at the anarchistic implications of Independency had cruelly wounded its leaders. Congregationalism played a notable and effective role in the gigantic struggle in which Independency had hurled back the onslaught of an embattled orthodoxy. But in the closing days of our period it drew back with pious horror from the devastation which its more radical allies had wrought on the foundations of Protestant catholicity. The indebtedness of Independency to Congregationalism is slighter than has been commonly supposed; its genius and contribution is to be found in the thought and achievements of men like John Goodwin and Hugh Peters rather than in the respectable but timorous leadership of a Caryl or an Owen.

Independency had made memorable and permanent contributions to the development of religious toleration in England. It had demolished for all time the conception of an exclusive and infallible Establishment which should seek by persecution and coercive power to compel the nation to the acceptance of a singular definition of the content and limits of Christian faith. The Independent view on this question had gained general acceptance in England by the time of the Restoration and could never be dislodged from the English mind. The Independents had vindicated to the satisfaction of England the individualism of the Christian faith and the high necessity that all men should enjoy latitude and freedom in the quest for saving truth. Furthermore, the Independents had with remarkable astuteness identified for all time the cause of political liberalism with religious toleration. They had deliberately cultivated the view that the Civil War had been fought in order to expand the freedom and liberties of Englishmen in the areas of political and religious liberalism, that it had been rendered inevitable by the political tyranny of Charles Stuart and by the religious bigotry of his ecclesiastical advisers. Whatever the historian may say regarding the historical accuracy of this thesis, it remains true that political liberalism and religious toleration were to remain inextricably bound throughout all of modern English history. Independency had rendered great services by clearing the ground and by laying the solid foundations upon which the edifice of religious toleration was subsequently to be reared in England.

B. Baptist Thought and its Relation to the Development of Religious Toleration, 1640–1660

1. General nature of baptist thought; the development of the sect in the revolutionary period

We have previously commented in some detail upon the heroic annal of the establishment of the Baptist communion in England. Several great leaders and thinkers had under very grave disabilities framed systematically the structure of Baptist thought and had succeeded in planting churches in divers areas in England.[1] The early Baptist leaders had reflected the liberalizing influences of Arminianism both in their broad doctrinal position and in their stalwart devotion to the philosophy of religious liberty. Their views were firmly rooted in the General, or Arminian, Baptist communion which was by 1626 securely established in London and in several provincial centres. In 1633, however, a far more orthodox Baptist communion was formed by a secession of numerous members from the mother Congregational Church, who, under the leadership of John Spilsbury, laid the foundations of the Particular, or Calvinistic, Baptist Church.[2] A few years later this group was enlarged by a further defection of Congregationalists led by the able and influential William Kiffin. The original Calvinistic congregation was in turn divided into two fragments, the one led by Barbone, and the other by Henry Jessey. In 1644, Jessey's church was divided, the separating group forming still another congregation with the notable Hanserd Knollys as its pastor.

During the period under survey the two Baptist communions maintained fairly distinct existence, both displaying zealous evangelical strength. In the capital the Particular Baptists were more ably led and were considerably more influential than their more liberal brethren.[3] But in the country at large the evidence would appear to indicate that the two groups were planting churches with approximately equal rapidity. The two communions were separated by important doctrinal differences

[1] *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration,* II, 262–268.

[2] *Ibid.*, II, 268.

[3] They were organized in seven congregations in London by 1644.

and during the revolutionary period there was but slight formal intercourse between them. The Particular Baptists possessed a rigid and imposing doctrinal structure which enabled them to maintain their sectarian identity in the troubled intellectual ferment of this period. The extremely liberal and highly evangelical General Baptists, however, possessed no such precision of identity and for a time all but disappeared in the sectarian confusion of this era. Their strength and numbers were sapped by Fifth Monarchy and Quaker defections and at times it is most difficult to differentiate clearly between them and their sectarian allies.[1] In due time, however, as the fanatical strength of radical sectarianism faded, many of the enthusiasts relaxed into the more orderly and sober churches of the General Baptists.

Though the division of the Baptist communion into two sharply separated doctrinal groups should engage the close attention of the historian of the sect, it does not appear that this schism extends importantly to Baptist thought in the larger areas of speculation which must be examined by the historian of toleration. No appreciable difference is to be discovered in their philosophy of toleration, despite the intense Calvinism of the younger communion, and we have consequently been disposed to treat Baptist thought as a unity. Several explanations for the common devotion of the two groups to religious liberty may be suggested. It should be recalled that both sects enjoyed a common heritage of liberal thought on this question, which had by 1640 become permanently embedded in Baptist philosophy. It is likewise of the greatest importance that both groups were completely sectarian in their philosophy and that both were dominated throughout the period under survey by a lay leadership. Moreover, the Calvinistic Baptists made the final logical deduction from the doctrine of predestination by employing it with the most impressive effectiveness to prove the futility of persecution and to demonstrate that the godly stood in no danger from the puny shafts of heresy. It is further apparent that, however important the doctrinal differences separating the two groups may have appeared to Baptist theologians, these subtle distinctions had but slight appeal to the mass of the Baptist laity. The lay leaders addressed themselves to the subject of religious toleration as Baptists and their thought and point of view was at once vitalized and disciplined by the momentous contribution which the Arminian leaders of the previous generation had rendered to the cause of religious liberty.

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[1] Belasco, P. S., *Authority in Church and State* (L., 1928), 27, for an interesting comment on this matter.

Throughout the revolutionary era the Baptists exhibited remarkable and efficient evangelical strength. As early as 1641 their lay preachers were spreading throughout the kingdom, disputing, preaching, and erecting churches. The leadership during our period remained lay in character although, as Dr. Whitley has shown, about twenty ministers who had been priests in the Establishment were to embrace the principles of the Baptist communion and to enter its ministry.[1] Lightfoot records in his *Journal* no less than seven complaints on the floor of the Assembly in a period of eight months against vigorous Baptist preaching in scattered parts of the kingdom in 1644.[2] The Baptist missionaries employed with singular success the effective if inflammatory Puritan institution of public disputations in spreading their faith. The first disputation appears to have been held at Westerleigh (near Bristol) in 1641; it was followed during the next twenty years by at least seventy-eight recorded public meetings of this character.[3] These disputations not infrequently precipitated a pamphlet debate which enlarged the topic of discussion. They were normally followed by the erection of a church in the locality involved, and some of the ablest of the Baptist leaders were converted through this interesting evangelical device.[4]

The army likewise proved to be a fertile field for Baptist missionary efforts. The Baptists have been regarded by an eminent historian as constituting the spear-head of the forces which persuaded the army to undertake the defence of religious liberty.[5] Even a casual survey of the biographies of the

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[1] Whitley, W. T., *A History of British Baptists* (L., 1923), 70.

[2] Lightfoot, *The whole works*, *Journal*, XIII, 81, 157, 163, 186, 302, 308, 311, *et passim*.

[3] *Baptist Historical Society*, *Transactions*, VI, 217.

[4] Amongst them Tombes, Jessey, Cornwell, and Blackwood. (*Baptist Historical Society*, *Transacts.*, VI, 218.)

[5] Ranke, *History of England*, III, 94.

Baptist leaders in this period indicates that an amazing number of them had served as soldiers or as chaplains in Cromwell's army. Since the sect drew its ministry principally from the laity the distinction between soldiers and lay preachers was often very hazy indeed amongst the Baptists in the army. During the early days of the war, the Baptist converts were usually won from the ranks, but by the next decade many of the officers in the military and a number of the political leaders in the Commonwealth and Protectorate were of this sectarian persuasion.[1]

A significant appraisal of the large tolerance which obtained during the revolutionary period may be gained by a brief examination of the liberty which the Baptists enjoyed. During the Commonwealth and Protectorate there is no indication that they were molested by the Government save as certain of their number embraced the seditious and incendiary tenets of the Fifth Monarchy.[2] Even more revealing is the fact that during the period of Presbyterian dominance the Baptists were protected by Parliament in a reasonably large freedom. Not less than twenty-six disputations were held by the sect during these years, with only sporadic restrictions by the civil power.[3] Crosby, who wrote as a Baptist apologist, was able to cite only eight instances of the molestation or imprisonment of Baptist partisans during the Presbyterian era, and in no case can the action taken be described as persecution.[4] In every instance repression was undertaken only in cases involving preaching or disputation on highly controversial or inflammatory topics calculated to stir further the religious discord which already seriously divided the parliamentary forces engaged in the prosecution of a desperate war. In most of the instances the Baptist view of infant baptism, which both the Presbyterians and Independents regarded as heretical, was involved, but even in these cases imprisonment was almost nominal. Baptist liberty was vindicated in a Declaration by Parliament in 1647 which, while deploring their view of infant baptism, recognized "that men should be convinced by the Word of God, with great gentleness and reason, and not beaten out of it with force and violence."[1] After this date, though not infrequently threatened by the fulminations of orthodoxy, the Baptists laboured under no substantial disabilities.

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[1] Whitley (*British Baptists*, 75) indicates that twenty-five of Ludlow's regimental officers were Baptists. We have previously noticed that Cromwell tended to replace Presbyterian officers with Independents and Baptists. (*Vide ante*, 107; *vide* also Brown, L. F., *The Political Activities of the Baptists and Fifth Monarchy Men in England during the Interregnum* (Washington, 1912), 10–11.)

[2] Ranke, in his comments in this connection, appears to confuse the Baptists with the Fifth Monarchy incendiaries. (*History of England*, III, 117, 204–205.)

[3] *Baptist Historical Society*, *Transacts.*, VI, 216–217.

[4] In 1640 Powell, who was shortly to embrace Fifth Monarchy opinions, was seized with fifty or sixty of his congregation by a band of "lewd fellows," but was subsequently discharged by the magistrate. Barber was imprisoned for almost a year in 1641 for denying the doctrine of infant baptism and for an incendiary attack upon tithes. (Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, I, 219.) In 1644 Benjamin Cox and Henry Denne were imprisoned for a short time for their attacks upon infant baptism. (*Ibid.*, I, 220, 221–222.) In 1645 two London Baptists were bound over to a parliamentary committee under

No careful historical study has yet been made of the spread of Baptist churches in England in the period prior to 1660. There is reason for believing, however, that the sect was larger than has usually been supposed. Indeed, it would seem probable that there were very nearly twice as many organized Baptist congregations in England and Wales at the time of the Restoration as there were properly constituted Congregational churches. It should be indicated, however, that many of the

similar charges but were released upon the representations of friends (*ibid.*, I, 226), while another, arrested at Newport-Pagnel, was discharged by parliamentary orders. Apparently in the same year the great Baptist leader Hanserd Knollys was thrown into jail for preaching against infant baptism. Bail was refused, and he was brought before the parliamentary committee in the presence of thirty members of the Assembly. He was discharged at once and the jailer was rebuked. (*Ibid.*, I, 227–228.) Some time later he was roughly handled in Suffolk and was brought before the parliamentary committee for a second time. Parliament ordered that "he might have liberty to preach in any part of Suffolk, when the minister of the place did not preach there himself." (*Ibid.*, I, 229.) Shortly thereafter Knollys formed a separate Baptist congregation in London and was haled before a committee of divines which sought to restrain him. The Baptist declared his firm intention to "preach the Gospel, both publickly and from house to house; saying it was more equal to obey Christ who commanded him, than those who forbad him." (*Ibid.*, I, 230.) A more serious view was taken of the case of a recalcitrant Baptist, Andrew Wyke, who in 1646 declined to answer charges of illegal preaching and "dipping" or to produce any authority for preaching. Wyke was apparently kept in jail for some time. (*Ibid.*, I, 235.)

[1] Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, I, 196.

Baptist groups were amorphous in constitution, casually led, and, on the whole, smaller than their Congregational prototypes. But, when these factors are taken into consideration, it remains probable that in 1660 there were in England fully as many Baptists as Congregationalists properly so called. Baptist missionary effort was undiminished to the moment of the Restoration and was rewarded with steady success. Furthermore, the rapid organization of churches in the parliamentary counties between 1649 and 1654 is tacit evidence of the evangelical zeal of the many Baptist soldiers who returned to their homes from the army in these years.

We have counted 297 Baptist churches, of the two persuasions, founded in England and Wales prior to 1660.[1] Of this number about 110 were probably General Baptist and 120 were Particular Baptist congregations, the remainder being uncertain in composition. It is interesting and significant to observe that the Baptists and Independents did not ordinarily flourish in the same areas in England. In the strongholds of Independency,[2] where perhaps rather more than half of the Congregational churches were concentrated, there were not more than 25 Baptist churches, if Gloucestershire is omitted. The Baptists were likewise weak in the six northern counties, where only nine may be counted. The strength of the communion was centred in the Midlands, in London and its environs, and in the southern counties. In the Midlands a great convention was held near Broughton in 1647, while four years later thirty congregations from this region sent delegates to a religious assembly. Well over half of the Baptist churches founded before 1660 were concentrated in Middlesex, Kent, Cambridgeshire, Leicestershire, Somersetshire, Gloucestershire, Lincolnshire, and Wales.[3]

In an earlier volume we have dealt in some detail with the general content and structure of Baptist thought in its relation to the development of the theory of toleration.[1] There was no important change in the Baptist philosophy during the two decades under consideration, but several observations may be made concerning the trend of the thought of the communion. Baptist thought during this period remained static despite the remarkable evangelical successes of the sect. No great leader emerged to give the group cohesion, solidarity, or a larger participation in the spiritual thought of the nation. The energy and interests of the English Baptists were completely expended in evangelical effort under a lay leadership which was neither competent nor disposed to contribute notably to the maturing of the philosophy of the sect. It was a period of feverish missionary energy rather than an age of reflection and digestion. The weight of a rich inheritance from the previous generation of great leaders lay upon the Baptists of the revolutionary era. We should likewise observe that the vitality of Baptist thought was enfeebled by the fact that in the struggle with Presbyterian intolerance its more conservative leaders, who appreciated the grave danger to which religious freedom was subjected, tended to lend their support to the defensive coalition which comprised Independency. Similarly, it was robbed of strength through the defection of many robust and forceful men who, in the absence of decisive leadership, drifted into the radical sects which lay far to the left of the main body of Baptist thought.

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[1] This computation is based upon the list printed in the *Baptist Historical Society, Transacts.*, II, 236–254, which has been revised and enlarged by reference to the large number of Baptist petitions in this period, usually subscribed by groups of churches.

[2] *Vide ante*, 356–357.

[3] About 200 churches may be counted in these areas. Dr. W. T. Whitley has expressed his general agreement with the writer's conclusions on the question of the geographical distribution of the Baptist churches in this period.

Perhaps no other religious group in England during the period under survey made so important a contribution to the development of the theory of religious toleration as did the Baptists. For numerous reasons their contribution to the development of a tolerant governmental policy cannot be regarded as comparable to that which modern England owes to Independency. But whereas the classical argument of Independency rested upon essentially negative foundations, the devotion of the Baptists to religious liberty was implicit in their philosophy of religion. The early Baptist thinkers had brought rich and fruitful logic to bear in the interests of religious liberty, which they defended as a positive and abstract religious right

[1] *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration,* II, 258–262.

inherent in every human being. The quality of Baptist arguments in this later period cannot be appraised as being so ordered, so cogent, or so richly endowed as the eloquent pleading of the earlier thinkers. But it was probably more effective in its influence upon English opinion. The leadership of the movement in this era was lay in origin, in outlook, and in interest. The argument consequently descends from the purer realm of abstract theory to the persuasion of common sense, necessity, and the requirements of human dignity. It is strikingly differentiated from the pleas of Independency in that it is characteristically positive. The Baptists assumed that all men of good will regarded with abhorrence the philosophy and the policy of persecuting churches. They did not deign to argue this case, and hence the assault upon Presbyterian bigotry, which looms so large in Independent theory, does not intrude prominently into the structure of their plea for toleration. They demanded religious freedom as a positive right and as a religious prerogative; they declined to be put on the defensive. The very audacity of their position was to be of momentous influence in this harassed age.

Relying heavily upon the richness of their traditions and deriving their philosophy of tolerance from the very essentials of their faith, the Baptist thinkers were able to plead persistently and consistently the cause of toleration.[1] We have noticed that the incidence of the pleas of the Independents for toleration shows a significant correlation with the threat of Presbyterian domination; that the conservative leaders of the party were compelled to embrace toleration as a defensive measure. This factor is almost entirely absent among the Baptist thinkers. The titles which we have employed are spread fairly evenly over the entire period, reflecting the positive character of Baptist devotion to the principles of religious liberty.[1]

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[1] Miss Brown takes the view that the Baptists would not, had they enjoyed political power, have translated their theory of toleration into political practice. She bases this view, it would appear, largely on incidents which occurred in Ireland during the Cromwellian period. (Brown, L. F., *Baptists and Fifth Monarchy Men*, 9, 136 ff.) It may be held that Miss Brown has arrived at a general conclusion based upon very special evidence. The general interest of her extremely valuable study is in the radical fringe of the Baptists and in the Fifth Monarchy Men. Very slight attention has been bestowed upon the thought or policy of the main stream of the conservative and more representative development of the sect during this period. Then, too, it is unsafe to argue from Ireland to England, especially during this era. The plantations in Ireland were essentially military settlements in a strange, hostile, and Catholic community. The Baptists who gained a considerable measure of influence in the planted districts were largely drawn from the army and were, on the whole, of the most radical persuasion. The allegations which were brought against them were concerned principally with vague charges of spiritual tyranny and want of charity lodged by men violently opposed to the Baptists. It will be noticed that when Cromwell sent Sankey and Cooper, Baptists of conservative temper who were devoted

Baptist thought in this period is likewise characterized by its emphasis upon the contribution which religious toleration can make to the stability of the civil State and by its own unequivocal loyalty to the existing political regime. The political thought of the Baptists in the revolutionary era was conservative and orderly.[2] They were evidently prepared to support any government which would provide a tolerant religious settlement in which they could find freedom and security.[3] It should be recalled that the Baptists held as a matter of principle that the State and Church must be completely dissociated. They required no assistance from the civil magistrate in the formation of their Church or in the maintenance of its discipline and hence could view with equanimity any political order which invested them with religious freedom. They found in the Cromwellian settlement of religion a large measure of freedom and accordingly were inclined to support the civil government with all the means at their disposal. They were gravely embarrassed from time to time by the seditious undertakings of millenarian fanatics who, in a number of instances, had been drawn from the Baptist ranks, and hence

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to him, to quiet the apprehensions of their co-religionists in Ireland, the complaints from the other religious groups came to an end. It cannot be denied that the Baptist leaders in Ireland were extremely imperious and completely disagreeable. But to argue from the exceptional circumstances of the Irish situation to a general conclusion respecting the thought and policy of the main body of the English Baptists appears extremely hazardous. Miss Brown's conclusion from this special evidence disregards completely the general tenor of Baptist thought and the consistent testimony of every responsible Baptist thinker in the period to the devotion of the sect to religious liberty.

[1] In the years 1640–1644, nine titles appeared; 1645–1649, twenty titles; 1650–1654, fourteen titles; 1655–1661, fifteen titles.

[2] Gooch, *English Democratic Ideas*, 227.

[3] Brown, *Baptists and Fifth Monarchy Men*, 203.

took particular pains to dissociate the peaceable intentions of the sect from the incendiary programme of the enthusiasts. The political conservatism of the Baptists in this period was not without effect in persuading thoughtful men that the civil State entrenches itself upon deeper and firmer foundations directly it frees itself from sectarian or exclusive preoccupations.

Finally, it will be observed that the Baptist theorists utilized effectively the economic arguments for religious toleration. It has frequently been suggested that economic considerations played a large part in the development of religious toleration in the commercial nations of the seventeenth century and it has been maintained that the Puritans were particularly amenable to the persuasion of economic interest. Neither of these positions appears to be sustained by the evidence prior to the Restoration. In fact, the economic argument is not to be found conspicuously present in the thought of any religious group before the Restoration, and is to appear in convincing form for the first time in the writings of the Baptists of this period. Two reasons may be tentatively suggested for the emergence in this unsuspected quarter of this argument, destined to acquire such general effectiveness during the Restoration. We have previously indicated that the exiled Baptist congregations in Holland were vitally influenced by the thought and mental environment of the liberal surroundings in which fate had placed them. Their relations with their Dutch co-religionists were intimate and continuous; they were not infrequently incorporated into the fabric of Dutch culture. The economic advantages of toleration loomed large in liberal Dutch thought of the early seventeenth century; its virtues were obvious to a society which enjoyed a commercial organization quite the most advanced in Europe. It seems probable that this point of view was absorbed by the English Baptist communities settled there, to emerge significantly in the thought of the communion in the revolutionary era. It will be observed that the economic argument as advanced by the Baptist theorists normally cited Holland as the example of the prosperity which might be attained in a tolerant *milieu*. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that the leadership of the sect in this period was lay in origin and outlook. The economic disadvantages of persecution and of sectarian strife were most apparent to the lay mind. Not only were several of the leading Baptist thinkers laymen; they were also prosperous London merchants. The interest of the Baptist theorists in the economic implications of toleration may be said to be derived principally from the intimate continental connections of the sect and from the lay quality of its leadership—it has no organic connection with the philosophy of the communion.

2. CHRISTOPHER BLACKWOOD, *c.* 1606–*c.* 1668

Baptist thought in the early years of the Civil War was seriously weakened by the fact that the great leaders of the previous period had died shortly before the precipitation of the crisis in England. The leaders of the sect during these years were young men whose energy and devotion were effective but who lacked the maturity and perspective requisite for the formulation of a philosophy. Among the oldest of these leaders was Christopher Blackwood,[1] who was probably not older than thirty-five at the outbreak of the War. Blackwood wrote vigorously and ably against the evils of persecution, denied categorically the right or capacity of any human agency to repress heresy and error, and argued with fine conviction the case of religious liberty, but he failed to lend to the principles of religious toleration a distinguished or systematic defence.

In his discussion of the evils of persecution Blackwood displayed the normal Baptist impatience with a religious system evolved from the philosophy of the Old Testament and resting upon its limited efficacy. The whole structure of persecution, he held, has been reared upon the flimsy timbers garnered from its texts. But even in the Old Testament we do not find the magistrate compelling men "to this or that beliefe" or punishing them for failure to believe.[1] The magistrate did no more than constrain the Jews to the performance of the religion which they professed, refraining scrupulously from forcing the consciences of people amongst them who were of an alien faith. The Christian Church cannot model its spiritual constitution upon the earthly kingdom and temple of the Jews. Jesus alone is king of the Christian Church and He is a king "to whom obedience ought to be willing and cheerful, not . . . forced."[2] The outward conformity which the magistrate can require does not provide men with the experience of regeneration which is essential to salvation. Nor can the ruler please God by bringing to Him an unacceptable sacrifice. The magistrate "is set over us only as men; not as we are Christians, but onely by accident; the bond betwixt magistrate and subject being essentially civill; but religious, accidentally only."[3] God has stripped the magistrate of all power in religion by specifically exempting the human conscience from the rude forces of ulterior coercion.

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[1] Blackwood was apparently a minister in the Anglican Church prior to his conversion by Cornwell during a disputation held in Kent. He gathered a Baptist congregation at Staplehurst, Kent, of which he was pastor for some time. Though he remained a Calvinist in doctrine, he became a notable opponent of the concept of a National Church and an outspoken enemy of all coercion of conscience. (Neal, *History of the Puritans*, III, 411.) In 1653 he accompanied Fleetwood to Ireland, where he remained until 1659. As a pastor in Dublin he was, according to Harrison, the "oracle of the Anabaptists in Ireland." (Ivimey, Joseph, *A History of the English Baptists, etc.* (L., 1811–1830), II, 230 ff.) He was probably resident in London at the time of the Restoration, but little is known concerning his later life.

Religious persecution, then, is a sacrilegious violation of the Church of Christ. Even worse, it robs the Church of its vitality and of its capacity for growth. For religious truth is revealed and enlarged but slowly as our capacities become greater and more sensitively attuned to God. The most pious "see but in part, and many glorious truths have been lately revealed, and more may we expect, if the compulsion of conscience, which is in most places of the Christian world, hinder not."[4] The crushing force of persecution hardens men into a rigid mould of opinion, effectively stifling their capacity for enlightenment and progress in God's truth. The philosophy which it engenders makes the ruler the pawn of the clergy, engages him in matters in which his knowledge is but slight, and makes religion the toy of historical circumstance. For it may be universally observed that the magistrate is invested with persecuting power only by that religious communion which happens to enjoy dominance. "Yea this very principle doubtlesse scares the papists from letting the Protestants have such freedome in their countries, because if they should prove the stronger party, they would compell them to a religion they so much abhor."[1] Religion can never be free and God's truth can never prevail until this evil doctrine has been disavowed by the Christian Church. It enjoys no greater validity when practised by the Protestants than does the inquisition of the Catholics. It has, in short, no place in the religion of Christ.

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[1] Blackwood, Christopher, *Apostolicall baptisme: or, a sober rejoinder, to a treatise written by Mr. Thomas Blake; intituled, Infants baptisme freed from antichristianisme, etc.* (L., 1646), 25.

[2] *Ibid.*, 26.

[3] Blackwood, *Apostolicall baptisme*, 27.

[4] Blackwood, Christopher, *The storming of Antichrist in his two last and strongest garrisons, of compulsion to conscience, and infants baptism, etc.* ([L.?], 1644), no pagin. (The copy consulted was so badly clipped that page references cannot be given.)

Most religious thinkers were in agreement with this principle, since persecution is customarily defined in the terms of the particular beliefs to which men happen to be devoted. But in the seventeenth century fewer men proceeded in their thought to the corollary position which denies to the civil power the right to punish admitted heresy and error. Blackwood displayed no such orthodox hesitation in this most important particular. We enjoy no capacity to punish heresy since we possess no infallible criteria of truth and error. Heresy should be permitted to exist freely, and the godly may rest their cause confidently in the vast power of God's truth.[2] Indeed, the Baptist apologist would suggest, the magistrate does not even possess power to punish "grosse idolatry, and blasphemy against God, Christ, the Scriptures, and holinesse, and seducements of persons by corrupt doctrines in fundamentall points, when there is no violation of the publike peace."[3] No restrictions whatsoever may be placed upon the freedom of the human conscience. It remains free to seek truth or error, and the judgment on its action must be left with God alone. In this conviction is discovered the philosophical basis upon which religious toleration as a positive right must inevitably rest.

The persecution and extirpation of what we fallibly denominate heresy and error have ever rested fundamentally upon a haughty pride and arrogance. The prevailing religious party persecutes through fear that dissident groups will in their turn rise to power. Fear, Blackwood shrewdly concludes, is the root cause of all intolerance. The dominant religious party, seeking to entrench its position, brands those who challenge its pretensions to exclusive possession of divine truth with the awful names of blasphemers and idolaters in order to implement the weapons with which they are to be destroyed. It endeavours to bind the conscience and to throttle the mind. It elevates into divine authority its own claims of infallibility, "and nothing different shall be practised, either in worship or discipline, but it shall be stigmatized with the brand of idolatry; and nothing shall be spoken or written, against the present wayes of worship and government, but it shall be defamed with the horrid name of blasphemy."[1]

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[1] Blackwood, *The storming of Antichrist*, no pagin.

[2] *Ibid.*, no pagin.

[3] Blackwood, *Apostolicall baptisme*, 84.

These are the methods wherewith men have wracked and perverted the gentle message of Christ to their own ends; these are the cords which have been employed to bind men in the chains of infallible authority to the destruction of their souls; these are the yokes under which the truth which God would reveal to men has staggered blindly and desolately. The awful sin of persecution, whether of truth or of error, can be argued to rest upon one of two foundations. Either it is derived from the sacrilegious fear of the dominant party for the security of its own power and emoluments, or it arises from the hysterical fear of men of puny grace that the foundations of their own faith may be overthrown. Blackwood had dealt with scathing logic with the first of these sources of intolerance. He then attacked the second from the impregnable assumptions of Calvinism itself. We have previously reflected that in the doctrine of predestination there is logically implicit a destructive argument against the persecution of error.[2] Blackwood, who was a Calvinist in doctrine, exploited this to full advantage. The mystery of election remains within the incomprehensible wisdom of God. But the very nature of election assures us that "it is not possible for the elect to be seduced so far as to be taken off from their foundation, Christ."[1] That is to say, the saints cannot be seduced by error and hence cannot be said to persecute for the protection of the purity or validity of their own faith. Similarly, heretics cannot be saved by means of compulsion. But it is at least possible that God may have intended them for salvation in due time. Hence when we persecute men we interfere in the very vitals of the election which God has intended. Truth cannot be destroyed by error and men who are truly regenerate cannot be drawn from truth by any wiles which it may devise.[2]

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[1] Blackwood, *Apostolicall baptisme,* 84–85.

[2] *Vide* Jordan, *Religious Toleration,* II, 202–204.

God has intended, therefore, that conditions of absolute liberty should prevail for the unfolding of His will and the regeneration of mankind. Intolerance has for too long stifled the development of truth and the progress of the Church. Blackwood embraced the principles of religious liberty with very few reservations indeed. We must permit all sects to exist and worship freely "because no side dare affirme, that there adversaries tenents are destructive unto their soules that hold them."[3] Even blasphemy, in Blackwood's considered opinion, should remain unmolested.[4] The Baptist writer, then, was willing to permit conditions of absolute freedom for every sect and for every error so long as the civil peace was not violated or the State endangered. This principle he was prepared to apply even to the Catholics, with a curious reservation which appears to result from his concern with civil stability. The Catholics, in so far as they constitute a religious body, should be granted complete liberty. We enjoy no sanctions which permit us to seek the extirpation of any religious belief held in conscience. Violent courses against the Romanists will have no other effect than to confirm them in their errors and to endanger the lives of Protestants abroad. They must be permitted to reside and worship in England until such time as "the number is so many that they are like to overtop the Protestants, or to come near them in numbers. . . ."[1] If this should occur, the stability of the civil State would be threatened and the safety of the people, which "is the highest law," would instruct the magistrate to command a portion of their number to sell their estates and seek refuge abroad. But it should be borne clearly in mind that such a drastic action would be dictated by the requirements of civil order and hence would not violate the religious liberty which must be extended to the Catholics.

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[1] Blackwood, *The storming of Antichrist*, no pagin.

[2] *Ibid.*, no pagin.

[3] *Ibid.*, no pagin.

[4] Thomas Edwards informs us that at the time when *The Storming of Antichrist* was written Blackwood still had reservations concerning the toleration of blasphemy. Blackwood informed a colleague that "he had received thanks for that book from a great commander in the army for so far as he had gone right, but wished him to re-collect his thoughts whether he was not out in those limitations and bounds, so that (said M. Blackwood) I am somewhat unsatisfied in my former limitations, doubting whether there ought not to be a universall toleration without any of those bounds . . . he is against any restraint in the case of blasphemy." (Edwards, *Gangraena*, iii, 98.)

That Christian unity which men have for so long sought with the cruel weapons of persecution may at last be attained when religious toleration prevails. Surely Christendom is now convinced that unity is not to be found at the command of the magistrate. The unity which we seek is to be discovered in the charity of tolerance. This unity means that men shall "be left to that light which God shall reveale unto them; each of them having a loving affection to all those that fear the Lord, however differing in judgment."[2] We shall then discover that the saints may be found in all sects in all lands, and the Church of God, grasping the spiritual weapons with which it has been endowed, may proceed to the fulfilment of its great mission.

3. EDWARD BARBER, *d.* 1674?

Blackwood's notable vindication of the principles of religious liberty cannot be said to add significantly to the great contribution which the Baptist thinkers of the earlier period had made to the development of the theory of toleration. But his writings serve to indicate that the views of the sect on this important question had been fixed in channels which were to be enlarged during the revolutionary era and which gave assurance that the Baptist theorists would not succumb to the fatal attractions of sectarian aggrandizement during this critical and confused period. The devotion of the Baptists to the principle of religious liberty received further enlargement and enrichment during the period of the Civil Wars at the hands of another obscure apologist, Edward Barber.[1] Barber attacked all species of religious coercion with almost bitter zeal. He warned England that religious liberty stood in grave danger from the Presbyterian pretensions, which were not derived from "any rule, power, or authority of Christ."[2] England has been engaged in war to secure permanently the benefits of toleration; she has witnessed the attempt of a bigoted orthodoxy to fasten a coercive Establishment upon the land during the period of her distraction. The Presbyterians have assumed an infallibility for themselves and a coercive authority for the magistrate which the Word of God does not grant.[3]

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[1] Blackwood, *The storming of Antichrist*, no pagin.

[2] Blackwood, *Apostolicall baptisme*, Pref.

For God has given men no authority to persecute even those opinions which orthodoxy presumes to constitute heresy and error. All men who remain loyal to the State must be protected in the exercise of the religion to which they are persuaded by reason and conscience. We have been expressly commanded to leave the tares until the harvest and even those who wilfully persist in false ways must be left unmolested. "The Sonne of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them.

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[1] Edward Barber was a citizen of London who embraced the Baptist faith long before the outbreak of the War. (Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, III, 3.) He was an early member of the White's Alley Church in London, which he left in 1639 to form a Baptist church in Bell Alley, of which he was the first pastor. (Whitley, W. T., *The Baptists of London* (L., [1928]), 101.) Barber was a merchant tailor by trade and was a staunch Arminian Baptist. (*Baptist Historical Society*, *Transacts.*, I, 118.) We have previously noticed that he was imprisoned for almost a year in 1641 for his outspoken attack on infant baptism and tithes. He was an effective evangelist and is known to have conducted missionary tours through the southern counties. (Whitley, *British Baptists*, 57.) In 1643, with another Arminian Baptist, Barber held a famous disputation with Kiffin and Patient in Kent. Four years later he was mobbed by Presbyterian partisans when he undertook to preach in Calamy's church in London, being rescued by a constable. (Barclay, Robert, *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth, etc.* (L., 1877), 290.) At about this time he became pastor of the church in Bishop's Gate, where he continued to serve until his resignation in 1674, presumably shortly before his death. (Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, II, 390–391.)

[2] Barber, Edward, *An answer to the Essex watchmens watch-word . . . or a discovery of their ignorance, in denying liberty to tender consciences in religious worship, to be granted to all alike, etc.* (L., 1649), 2.

[3] *Ibid.*, 5–8.

Which sheweth plainly, that Christ would have no man hurt for religion, yea, though they were refusers of himselfe."[1] The dissociation between the civil power and religious life is absolute. The magistrate has been charged with the punishment of offences against the civil law, while God has reserved to His own judgment all transgressions in matters of faith. We may strain to secure the repentance of the sinner, but we may not constrain him to renounce his errors. Repentance is the free gift of God and we err dangerously when we seek to force men to a knowledge of truth which He has not revealed to them.

The intensely spiritual and personal conception of religion implicit in the philosophy of the Baptists made the slightest religious coercion abhorrent to the sect. Insisting with fine persistence on the spiritual autonomy of the individual Christian, they went farther to deny the very principles of the National Church. No compulsion whatever may be exercised in the formation of a church and no human power can prescribe the terms or limits of sectarian worship. The gospel can be advanced only by the spiritual weapons of the Church. Herein lies the awful error of the Presbyterians, who seek "by violence and compulsion to set up the Gospel, a thing contrary to the very nature therof, and Christ and his disciples practice."[2] Force is wholly impotent to accomplish that inner regeneration by which faith is gained. The true nature of faith will not be revealed and the instrument by which it may be attained will not be available to the Church until the hideous cancer of persecution has been removed.

As an Arminian Baptist, Barber was likewise deeply stirred by the reflection that men and women who in due time might be converted from their sins were being destroyed while ridden with error. No man can be certain that those who are now lost will not be reclaimed. We know that those "who are now in the snare of the devill . . . may hereafter come to repentance; They that are now blasphemers and persecutors . . . may in time become most glorious and faithfull witnesses."[1] Those who are now blind may see, and those who now reject the truth may through the mercy of God receive it.[2] That Church cannot claim the title of Christian which destroys those whom God has destined to be its members.

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[1] B., E., [i.e. Barber, Edward], *To the kings most excellent majesty, and the honourable Court of Parliament. The humble petition of many his majesties loyall and faithfull subjects, some of which having beene miserably persecuted by the prelates and their adherents, etc.* (L., 1641) (s.sh.).

[2] Barber, Edward, *A declaration and vindication of the carriage of E. B., etc.* (L., 1648), no pagin.

Barber discovered in the doctrine of general redemption a conception of faith which made all religious persecution abhorrent and impious. All men are endowed by God with the capacity for salvation and He seeks to unfold saving truth to their beclouded eyes. The manifest will of God has throughout history been thwarted by the efforts of arrogant men to confine His truth into rigid definitions of their own contrivance, and by the iniquitous doctrine of persecution which has laid waste His mercy and dulled the spiritual weapons wherewith men are redeemed. From such a religious philosophy the principle of complete religious liberty arises as a condition of its fulfilment.

The ends of religion are best served when the State grants to all men unrestrained liberty of conscience and freedom of worship. Since worship is spiritual, Christ requires only "voluntary, spirituall worshippers to worship him."[3] All Christian communions which claim to be churches, including the Anglicans and the papists, should be admitted to probationary liberty. Truth can engage error most successfully when both are permitted absolute freedom of expression; when the issues between them are not obscured by repression and passion. This is not to say that grievous error will not flourish in the garden of the Church. Yet, even if the heretical sects were as evil as the orthodox contend, no reason could be argued "to take away our lives, estates, or banish us, pulling down our houses to make iakes [*sic*—stakes?] therof, and hang us on the timbers . . . I say we proving loyall to our country, though holding errors in our judgements, yet were that no ground for persecution."[4] Offences which we believe to be against the truth of God must be left to Him for correction and punishment. Christ has expressly commanded that those who are blindly led into a false religion should be left alone. All men should remain unmolested until God has revealed the way of salvation to them.[1] Our pity and not our anger should encompass those whom we believe to be lost.

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[1] Barber, *To the kings most excellent majesty*, s.sh.

[2] Barber, *An answer to the Essex watchmens watch-word*, 15–16.

[3] *Ibid.*, 9.

[4] *Ibid.*, 13.

When this charity which Christ requires of us prevails, the solid foundations of the Kingdom of God will have been established. We must reflect that in the building of His Church "there was no sound of iron heard, to shew, that Christ will have in his church a free consent, not compelled by lawes and statutes . . ."[2] We should follow Christ's own example, who left free and unmolested the multitudinous sects and religions which swarmed in the Empire of the Caesars.[3] God has reserved to His own awful majesty the dominion over the conscience and the spiritual fate of the human race. When we seek to compel men to enter His Church we defy His ordinances and usurp His throne. It must be clear to all pious and reasonable men "that no man ought to be forced in matter of religion, the Gospel being spirituall" and requiring only spiritual worshippers who "cannot be made so, but by the Word and Spirit of God, which breatheth where and when it listeth, and not where and when mens lawes and statutes pleaseth."[4] The faith and worship of Christ are free and flourish only in an atmosphere of complete liberty. The persecution which has beset Christianity arose not from Christ but from bloody tyrants and enemies of the true Church.

In Barber's thought may be detected an attitude of mind which embraced religious toleration as an obvious spiritual necessity. He displayed the completely subjective and individualistic conception of religion so typical of his sect. Christianity can be conceived in no unit larger than the individual Christian, who must remain autonomous. Faith is gained in consequence of a personal religious experience which represents the direct intervention of God in the life and destiny of the individual. God is the master of the human soul; He leads it into larger vistas of experience as faith is enlarged. The delicacy and sanctity of this relationship must not be violated by the harsh intrusion of coercive power. Before such a religious persuasion persecution fades into a remembered nightmare of the brutish past, and the National Church resting upon an enforced conformity is viewed as a distorted extension of the civil State. The seventeenth century Baptist, reposing absolute confidence in the power of truth to persuade and in the intimacy of his own relationship to God, viewed with mingled pity and contempt the miserable condition of the erroneous. He detected with penetrating logic that those who fear error, those who quail before false teachings, are themselves men of little faith. Not only did he extend to error the freedom which he himself demanded, but he held with singular consistency that in these circumstances alone could the Church which he envisaged gain maturity and dignity.

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[1] Barber, *An answer to the Essex watchmens watch-word*, 14.

[2] *Ibid.*, 16.

[3] Barber, *To the kings most excellent majesty*, s.sh.

[4] Barber, *An answer to the Essex watchmens watch-word*, 17.

4. Roger Williams, 1604?–1683

a. Introduction

One of the greatest of the sectarian writers of the period was Roger Williams, who for our purposes may be considered as a Baptist, though he was more closely associated during his two sojourns in England with the political leaders of Independency. Williams was in England during two critical periods for religious liberty (1643–1644 and 1651–1654), and his most important works were written in the highly charged atmosphere of the English religious scene. His books were published in England and enjoyed a wider circulation and a more decisive contemporary influence in the mother country than in the colonies, where his notable experiment in religious liberty was testing the principles formulated by liberal thinkers. His courageous discussion of the perplexing questions of persecution and toleration was to exercise a considerable influence on the powerful body of opinion in England which had embraced the principles of religious toleration as the only solution to the bitter sectarian strife which engulfed the land.

Williams was not a great creative writer, nor can he be considered as an important contributor to the philosophical foundations of religious liberty. It is evident in all of his writings that he drew heavily from the earlier Baptist theorists, who had performed such notable services to religious toleration by undergirding it with a positive theory which they maintained was implicit in religion itself.[1] Williams expanded this theory only in particulars. It is also apparent that he owed much to the more radical Independents with whom he was intimately associated and to whom he rendered such militant support. And, finally, Williams's thought had been moulded by a decade of earnest controversy with intolerant ecclesiastics in America and by the remarkable experiment in religious liberty in Rhode Island which had been conceived in the fire of this controversy.[2] Certainly, few living Englishmen were equipped to render more telling contributions to the development of religious toleration, and no contemporary figure could command such attention as this remarkable and accomplished leader. This obligation to religious liberty in England Roger Williams discharged faithfully and effectively.

Williams was a Baptist only in the sense that he stood nearer to that sect in his religious philosophy than to any other contemporary religious communion. He may more properly be regarded as a wholly emancipated individualist whose religious philosophy never settled into a rigid dogmatic pattern; as a free thinker whose spirit roamed with daring recklessness through the full range of religious speculation.[3] In his writings is to be found a substratum of Baptist teachings shot through with wandering veins of speculation which betoken mystical and Puritan influences.[4] Dominating his thought is a warm mysticism and an anxious yearning for a complete apprehension of the fulness of God's truth.[5] His religious philosophy was fluid and restless, gaining consistency and direction from the steady devotion which he lent to the principle of religious liberty as a religious right.[1] His persistent and unequivocal advocacy of religious toleration may be regarded as the foundation of a religious philosophy upon which an elaborate and somewhat fantastic structure of belief was erected. Williams's own thought demonstrates the axiom that from religious liberty there flows a complete spiritual individualism and a rich and luxuriant freedom of speculation which an ordered religious society can only regard as anarchistic. He was wholly contemptuous of the claims of all organized religious communions, holding "that no Christian Church since Apostolic times had had adequate evidence of its divine origin." He was content with the authority and doctrinal pretensions of no church and plainly hoped that a revelation from God might shortly enlighten men further.[2] But until such time as God's will and truth were clearly and infallibly understood by all men, no authority could legitimately restrict the complete freedom of speculation and belief necessary to the further discovery of truth and essential to the attainment of salvation.

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[1] Mackinnon, James, *A History of Modern Liberty* (L., 1906–1908), III, 475.

[2] Ruffini, *Religious Liberty*, 168.

[3] Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, I, 64–65.

[4] Troeltsch, *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, II, 934.

[5] Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, I, 65.

Williams's style reflects the tempestuous freedom of his thought. Masson has admirably said of the *Bloody Tenent*, "there is a dash in the book, the keenest earnestness and evidence of a mind made up, and every now and then a mystic softness and richness of pity, yearning towards a voluptuous imagery like that of the Song of Solomon."[3] Williams wrote with rich poetry, with passionate conviction, and with an eloquent pleading which left its impress upon the seventeenth century mind. So intense was his zeal for religious liberty that he lifts up the mind troubled with the preoccupations of orthodoxy to view the as yet uncharted vistas which religious freedom opens up to the enquiring and courageous spirit. He argued his case with almost reckless boldness, sweeping away with utter abandon the view of the Church and of organized religion to which ordered and disciplined minds still clung in obedience to the traditions of centuries of Christian history.

At the same time, Williams's works are marred by the very ardour of his spirit. All of his writings suffer from an almost complete want of organization and coherence. There are long arid stretches in which he flounders for the thread of his thought and not infrequently his mystical passages are, at least to the lay mind, simply incomprehensible. He evidently wrote with hot haste and his works are marked by passion and not by reflection. Characteristically, his thought wanders in a maze of subjective rambling, to be broken at last by a passage which glows with an almost transcendent luminosity. His thought must be regarded as unsystematic, eccentric, undisciplined, and occasionally tedious. But supporting and ennobling it at all times was a passionate and unreserved devotion to the cause of religious liberty.

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[1] Ruffini, *Religious Liberty*, 171.

[2] Parkes, H. B., *John Cotton and Roger Williams Debate Toleration*, 1644–1652, *New England Quarterly*, IV, iv, 750–751.

[3] Masson, *Life of John Milton*, III, 113; Ernst, James, *Roger Williams* (N.Y., 1932), 246.

Williams made a notable contribution to the development of religious toleration in England. He defended the cause of complete spiritual freedom, basing his philosophy upon the nobler grounds of liberty of conscience rather than upon the more expedient grounds of religious toleration. His carefully reasoned argument for the complete dissociation of Church and State, resting upon his own experience in America, may be regarded as the most important contribution made during the century in this significant area of political thought. But Williams's contribution to the theory and development of toleration in England was far more limited. His thought cannot be regarded as original, his defence of toleration was neither systematic nor complete, while the radicalism of his doctrinal position robbed him of decisive influence on the political and religious groups which were then founding a tolerant ecclesiastical Establishment in England.[1]

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[1] Williams's place in contemporary English religious thought has been gravely distorted, in the judgment of this writer, by recent American biographers. His very great contribution to the development of toleration cannot be denied, but a proper understanding of English history and English thought in this period would make it impossible to regard him as the first apostle of religious toleration in England. Nor can he be said to have been the source of the devotion of the Independents and sectaries to religious liberty. In particular, we do violence to history when we credit to an author, whom we are considering in a biographical vacuum, the appearance of ideas similar to his in contemporary or later works. The development of thought is a complex process in which every great thinker plays a part that must be carefully assessed in relation to the whole range

Williams's most significant contribution to the theory of toleration is to be found in his masterly argument against the interference of the State in religious life. The spheres of the Church and the State are sharply dissociated in his theory, which displays no Calvinistic nostalgia for an ordered National Establishment. Indeed, this argument occupies a disproportionate importance in Williams's thought, since it was evolved during his momentous controversy with an embattled Puritan orthodoxy in New England. A full examination of John Cotton's thought would disclose a philosophy almost precisely identical with that examined in our consideration of Puritan theory, though there were, of course, important differences, particularly in Cotton's own estimation. It will be necessary, therefore, to consider briefly the premises of Cotton's thought in order to discover the reasons for Williams's preoccupation with the problem of the relations of the civil State to religion.

Williams held, correctly, that in his opponent's theory the Church and State were inextricably joined.[1] Cotton shared the normal Puritan (Calvinistic) view that the will of God, which is infallibly revealed in the Bible, must engage the attention of both Church and State. Both must labour to protect the purity of faith and to exterminate error from the garden of the Church. Church and State flourish or decline together; their connection is intimate and organic.[2] The Church, which the State shores up with its power, is the Church of God which can brook no rivals and no falsity lest it be ruined, the State consumed, and the fury of God's wrath provoked. Cotton urged this view with such vigour as to arouse his great antagonist to charge that he "publickly taught, and teacheth . . . that body-killing, soule-killing, and State-killing doctrine of not permitting, but persecuting all other consciences and wayes of worship but his own in the civill state, and so consequently in

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of contemporary thought. The historian's quarrel with the biographer, and particularly with the biographer of the new school, is that he wrests a complex figure from a complex setting, seeking to epitomize history in the far too simple terms of the individual.

[1] Williams, Roger, *Mr. Cottons letter lately printed, examined and answered* (L., 1644) (ed. by R. A. Guild) (*Narragansett Club Publ.*, I, Providence, R.I., 1866), 42–43.

[2] Freund, *Die Idee der Toleranz*, 242–243.

the whole world, if the power or empire thereof were in his hand."[1] Cotton would extirpate by means of force errors which undermined the fundamentals of faith, as defined by the Church, and would extend to circumstantial errors only a very limited toleration.[2] The virtue of such repressive measures is, Cotton admits, largely negative and preventative, but it is at least possible that the fear of corporal punishment may reform those who are not restrained by the certainty of eternal torment.[3] An heretic is damned in the next world and none but good effects can result from his punishment in this world. The Christian Church must endeavour to create in this world the kingdom which Christ has commanded, seeking to avert the ruin which destroys the Commonwealth that despises His word and will.[4] Cotton's thought reflects and indeed amplifies the Calvinistic conception of the spotless Church. The group of which he was the intellectual leader had sought to plant in the New World such a godly community and it frantically endeavoured to rear up a massive dam against the subtle and insidious forces which eddied against the New England shores as a backwash from the titanic struggle then being waged in England. Heroic measures were taken by the colonial theocracy to isolate itself against the doctrinal and ecclesiastical decay which had set in so morbidly in England. Roger Williams was the Arminius of New England orthodoxy.

b. The problem of Church and State

i. *The role of the magistrate*

Williams dealt at great length with the difficult problem of the relations of Church and State. Since he denied categorically that the magistrate enjoyed any power in the Church he was obliged to frame carefully a new conception of the nature and capacity of the State. Above all, it must establish its power upon foundations unrelated to religious uniformity.

He denounced without reservation the power and influence of the ruler in the Christian State. "All civill states," he wrote,

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[1] Williams, *Mr. Cottons letter*, 44, *et vide* 95.

[2] Cotton, John, *The bloudy tenent, washed, and made white in the bloud of the Lambe, etc.* (L., 1647), 3, 5–6.

[3] *Ibid.*, 20.

[4] *Ibid.*, 164–165.

"with their officers of justice in their respective constitutions and administrations are proved essentially civill, and therefore not judges, governours or defendours of the spirituall or Christian state and worship."[1] No power in the Church can be sustained for the magistrate, whether he be Christian or pagan.[2] The power which princes have exercised in religious affairs has been usurped, impious, and uniformly destructive to both Church and State.[3] The orthodox have claimed with one breath that the prince has been set to rule over the Church and with the next that he must "lick the dust of the churches feet."[4] Dominion over men's consciences has been arrogated by selfish factions which have steadily sought their own aggrandizement while destroying the religion of Christ.

That philosophy which grants to the magistrate the direction of the Church and control over conscience is grounded neither in Christian truth nor in natural reason. Again and again Williams drives this barb deep into the theory of an enforced uniformity. Such a view of faith and of the Church makes salvation depend entirely upon the whim of the ruler.[5] The orthodox applaud Elizabeth's persecution of the Catholics, forgetting that by an authority equally valid James persecuted the Puritans. Both sovereigns ruled by an equal right and even the orthodox can be driven to admit that "all magistrates must persecute such whom in their conscience they judge worthy to be persecuted."[6] God has not meant His truth to be subject to the gauge of war and circumstance. Truth is not seen clearly either by the magistrate or by the godly and cannot be ordered by the formula of prescription. Even amongst those who fear and follow God in England there are lamentable and profound differences, and, Williams ironically remarked, these differences have not been cured by the sea passage to New England.[7] In these circumstances it would be madness to deliver the power to define and enforce faith into the fallible hands of the magistrate.

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[1] [Williams, Roger], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution, for cause of conscience, discussed, in a conference betweene truth and peace, etc.* (L., 1644) (ed. by S. L. Caldwell) (*Narragansett Club Publ.*, III, Providence, R.I., 1867), Pref. (3).

[2] *Ibid.*, 121.

[3] Williams, Roger, *The bloudy tenent yet more bloody, etc.* (L., 1652) (ed. by S. L. Caldwell) (*Narragansett Club Publ.*, IV, Providence, R.I., 1870), 76–78, 161–168, 171, 187, 218–219, 243.

[4] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 121.

[5] *Ibid.*, 214.

[6] *Ibid.*, 188.

[7] *Ibid.*, 217.

The orthodox have persistently and ruinously confused the functions of the Church and State.[1] They have defined the power of the magistrate in the Church with evasive and deceptive phrases which cannot conceal their disposition to entrust to him the capacity to order doctrine and worship.[2] They have bestowed upon him a power over men's souls equivalent to his just powers over their bodies. "Upon his judgement must the people rest, as upon the minde and judgement of Christ. . . ."[3] They have sought to deliver religion up as a sacrifice to the caprice of the ruler.[4]

Actually, however, the orthodox have sought to conceal the iron chains of dominion which they propose to fasten upon conscience by the prostitution of the ruler's proper authority. When such men talk of the godly magistrate they envisage one prepared to do their bidding. Thus Williams prods Cotton with the awful charge of requiring the ruler to frame religion according to the Cottonian conception of orthodoxy. The orthodox deny the very title of magistracy to those who are not the pawns of their will.[5] These men seek to conceal their own imperious and ruinous intolerance in the power which the ruler wields at their command. They would reduce religion to formulae of their contrivance and stretch the human conscience to the frame of their own arrogant definitions. They seek not the unity of Christ but the dead and formal uniformity of the antichrist.

All of the great Churches have been guilty of delegating to the civil magistrate a power in the Church which Christ has expressly reserved to Himself. The Catholics and prelatists have been the worst offenders, but the Presbyterians seem quite as disposed to make the magistrate "the judge of the true and false church, judge of what is truth, and what error."[6] On the other hand, the true separatists desire the sanction of no civil power in the exercise of their faith, preferring the

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[1] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 110–111, 300.

[2] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 308–309.

[3] *Ibid.*, 309. [4] *Ibid.*, 311. [5] *Ibid.*, 177–178. [6] *Ibid.*, 350.

"two-edged sword of Gods spirit to try out the matter by."[1] They adhere firmly to the conviction that the function of the civil ruler is strictly confined to the exercise of his temporal duties. They recall that Christ consciously and deliberately refrained from mingling the affairs of this world with the problems of faith.[2] They take warning from the annals of history which disclose that the Church has been most injured by those rulers who have sought to reform and direct its spiritual life.[3] The persecuting zeal of a godly Constantine did the Church far graver injury than "the raging fury of the most bloody Neroes."[4] The godly rulers of the past perhaps intended to exalt Christ, but the fruit of their interference was a toll of blood and horrible persecutions which for centuries have wasted the Church.[5] These men may have done their utmost to exalt the Kingdom of Christ, but they accomplished nothing more than the binding of men to an arbitrary and fallible definition of truth.[6] Their policy bred a purge of ruin, division, and bloodshed. The civil magistrate must be scrupulously excluded from any interference in religious affairs. In his public capacity the ruler owes no more to the Church than the protection of his subjects in absolute freedom of worship, whether they worship truly or falsely.[7]

ii. *Denunciation of the National Church ideal and of enforced uniformity*

The denial of spiritual authority to the magistrate led Williams to a clear and forceful denunciation of a National Church ideal which the Presbyterians were then propounding with such persistent energy. Williams shared the normal Baptist view that the true Church was composed by the voluntary association of men who had experienced personal regeneration. To men who thus conceived the Church the ideal of a National Establishment based upon an enforced uniformity was at once repellent and impious. Williams declared that the attempt to force all men, saints and sinners alike, into a National Church was one of the greatest of the evils threatening England.[1] This constitution of the Church "confounds the civill and religious" and destroys the principles of Christianity and of civil government.[2] A National Establishment delivers spiritual power into the hands of the civil magistrate, making faith rest on no surer foundations than the caprice of his will.[3]

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 352.

[2] *Ibid.*, 367.

[3] *Ibid.*, 367–368, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 72.

[4] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 184.

[5] *Ibid.*, 184–185.

[6] *Ibid.*, 368–369.

[7] *Ibid.*, 372–373.

No thoughtful man can possibly hold that a National Church fulfils the will of Christ for His saints. Historically, such establishments have developed in consequence of a tragic confusion between the civil and spiritual orders. They have been constituted by "a racking and tormenting of the soules, as well as of the bodies of persons," since they have endeavoured to compel all men into a common frame of belief.[4] The National Church has been defended exclusively by texts drawn from the Old Testament, despite the fact that the State-Church of the Jews came to an end with the advent of Christ. The Jews were a united people led directly by the hand of God. But no modern nation can claim either such uniformity or such leadership. The Christian age is one of revolution, change, and variety.[5] If we bind the Church of Christ irrevocably to the will of the State, we render it liable to the cyclic changes in political organization which are wholly unconnected with the absolute character of Christ's eternal truth. The tragedy of this error has been abundantly exemplified in England since the days of the Henrician Reformation.[6] "What sober man stands not amazed at these revolutions? and yet like mother like daughter: and how zealous are we their off-spring for another impression and better edition of a nationall Canaan . . . which if attained, who knowes how soone succeeding kings or parliaments will quite pull downe and abrogate."[1]

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[1] Williams, *Mr. Cottons letter*, 77.

[2] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 3–4.

[3] *Ibid.*, 257–258.

[4] [Williams, Roger], *Queries of highest consideration, proposed to Mr. Tho. Goodwin Mr. Phillip Nye Mr. Wil. Bridges Mr. Jer. Burroughs Mr. Sidr. Simpson. And to the commissioners from the Generall Assembly (so called) of the Church of Scotland; upon occasion of their late printed apologies for themselves and their churches, etc.* (L., 1644) (ed. by R. A. Guild) (*Narragansett Club Publ.*, II, Providence, R.I., 1867), 25–26.

[5] *Vide* [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 314–326, for the complete argument.

[6] *Ibid.*, 344–345.

The Church, then, gains freedom and can attain true organization only when it is completely dissociated from the civil State. The National Church has arisen from a confusion with the civil State and its history has been an unbroken annal of persecution of conscience and perversion of purpose. Both the State and the Church have suffered grievously from the unnatural alliance into which wilful men have forced them. This false identity has to recommend it nothing more than tradition and has to condemn it the manifest Word of God and the blood of countless saints who have been sacrificed to its wicked ends. Men have come to believe that the security of the State is to be found in a religious uniformity which is identical with their religious loyalty. Magistrates have been falsely persuaded that the interests of political stability are somehow linked with the maintenance of religious uniformity. This dangerous and impious conception, which has been foisted on the civil authority by an arrogant and factious clergy, has wrought irreparable harm to both State and Church during the history of Christendom.

iii. *The true nature of good citizenship*

Williams made a notable contribution to the essentially *politique* view which sought to discover other foundations for civil loyalty than religious uniformity. He had proved that the Church was infinitely harmed when it was bound to the wheel of the secular State. This position had been argued so persistently and successfully by various lay and sectarian groups that it may be regarded as having been established by 1644. Williams undertook, in addition, the more novel and difficult task of demonstrating that the State itself gained strength and stability when it freed itself from the burden of maintaining an enforced uniformity.

The State may attain its highest end only when it can devote itself with singleness of purpose to its proper secular activities. Both Church and State achieve perfection when they develop in a condition of mutual independence. "Divers ages of temporal prosperity to the anti-christian kingdom, prove that common assumption and maxime false, to wit, that the church and commonweale are like Hipocrates twins, weep and laugh, flourish and fade, live and die together." The great prosperity and accomplishments of many heathen states may be said to prove that the roots of civil power do not depend on religious orthodoxy.[1] And history has likewise demonstrated that "true civility and Christianity" may both flourish in a State though the two spheres are completely dissociated.[2] No State burdened with duties which belong properly to religion can be a perfect State. The civil Commonwealth has been weakened and endangered by its unwarranted assumption of the "soul-killing" and "state-killing" doctrine of persecution. The problems and the ills of State and Church are wholly different in quality and in kind, calling for administration and cure by wholly independent agencies. Thus "the straining of mens consciences by civil power, is so far from making men faithful to God or man, that it is the ready way to render men false to both." Intolerance and persecution are ruinous to the State. The attempt of the magistrate to extirpate any group which orthodoxy denominates as heretical can have no other effect than the provocation of civil war. If such a policy is prosecuted to its logical end, the State will be dissolved in war, anarchy, and utter ruin.

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution,* 345. Williams was here specifically attacking the Directory.

Williams seems to argue not only that religious persecution is the gravest enemy to the stability of the State but that its practice almost invalidates the legality of its sovereignty. For persecution destroys the very roots of magistracy and the essential ends of the civil State.[3] The English Revolution gains its chief validity in the resolution which has inspired it to destroy the tyranny over conscience. Persecution lays waste the very foundations of the civil order, and just men may then take up arms for the establishment of a more righteous society.

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[1] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 170; *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 251.

[2] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 4.

[3] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 207, 454, 238; *Queries of highest consideration*, 35.

The civil State, then, can gain security and can command the complete loyalty of its subjects when it reposes its sovereignty upon bases that have no relation to the spiritual life of its citizens. The Christian State evidently rests upon foundations precisely similar to those enjoyed by heathen commonwealths.[1] Nor has diversity of religion produced any impairment in the strength or prosperity of the civil commonwealth.[2] Christianity adds nothing to the legality of the State's power since by its very nature it exercises no influence upon natural things.[3] The State is a voluntary association of human beings whose legitimacy resides in roots that are implicit in the political relationship; in origins that penetrate far beyond the Christian era into the dim mists of pagan antiquity. Moreover, just as the validity of the State has no connection with its Christianity, so the religion of the subject bears no relation to his citizenship. He is bound to the State by ties of loyalty which are explicitly civil, just as his membership in the Church embraces purely spiritual obligations. The subject's social capacity is not affected by his religion. Hence Jews, Turks, or Anti-Christians may be fully as loyal and eminent subjects of the State as its Christian members.[4] The State must cultivate the instinct of loyalty and good citizenship by emphasizing the secular basis upon which it rests. Moral virtue, fidelity, and honesty may be inculcated by the discipline of the State in men who are not saints of God.[5] And above all else, the civil magistrate will not confound moral goodness with religious sanctity.[6] He will perceive that spiritual error presumes no danger to the civil order and that it must be corrected and cured by the Church whose unity it lays waste. The civil ruler will rest content in the assurance that men totally devoid of religion may be possessed of a civic morality which makes them good and valuable members of society.

Williams's argument mounted steadily to a revolutionary plea for the absolute dissociation of Church and State. Utilizing the sectarian conception of religious organization, he had denounced with effective and persuasive logic the very concept of the National Church and had demonstrated that religion is best served when it is left free. He had shown, moreover, that the civil State exists independent of the religious complexion of its citizenry; that it in fact acquires strength and permanency only when it ignores the religious preoccupations which they may have. Good citizenship is entirely unconnected with religious orthodoxy and may, indeed, be found in men who are irreligious. This view repudiated completely a conception of the State which was almost as old as Christianity and renounced without reserve a noble ideal of the interrelations of the temporal and spiritual spheres which had absorbed the attention of wise and pious men through the long and tragic centuries of the Middle Ages. It declared that the social architecture of the past must be adjusted to the living necessities of the present. It opened up a vast area of speculation and experiment in both civil and religious life which human society is still exploring.

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[1] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 71.

[2] *Ibid.*, 238.

[3] Freund, *Die Idee der Toleranz*, 255.

[4] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 142.

[5] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 207–208, 365.

[6] *Ibid.*, 406.

iv. *The argument for the complete separation of the two spheres*

Williams sought to emphasize the natural origins of the State in order to establish more firmly its dissociation from the religious life of the saints who in part comprise it. The State and the civil society are creations of nature. The family constitutes a prototype of the State which in an historical sense is but an enlargement of its intimate relationship. Men evolved the social contracts which undergird the State long before the knowledge of religion unfolded before them. Its origin is to be found in the free association of a people formed for the attainment of a more stable and prosperous community life. Religious differences amongst its citizens bear no more relation to the sources of its authority or to the sphere of its influence than the complexion or dress of its members. It can be argued neither from divine nor from natural law that it possesses any authority or interest in religious affairs.

The State has been led by crafty and intolerant men into interference in the affairs of the Church in order to secure the aggrandizement of their own position. It has been weakened and perverted by men who would waken Moses from his grave, and who ignore the gospel of Christ.[1] The orthodox have deliberately confounded the civil power with the Church by seeking to order the Christian community on the pattern of the Jewish Commonwealth.[2] They imply in their insidious teaching that the magistrate enjoys valid power only when he yields to their own interpretation and enforces their own glosses.[3] The effect of this philosophy has been to raise up a persecution which has been the chief cause of misery and the disruption of civil peace,[4] while the effect upon religion has been even more invidious. The orthodox have sought to break down the wall of conscience, not with admonition and excommunication, but with powder and shot. They have ignored the patent fact that none but spiritual remedies can prevail against spiritual ills.[5] When the Church is left free to employ its peculiar resources it can prevail over error. But the weapons of man and the weapons of God cannot be joined.[6] Christ was decisive in dissolving the National Church of the Jews and explicit in His establishment of a spiritual worship ordered by a spiritual government.[7] The magistrate shares neither responsibility nor authority in that Church.

Williams concluded his discussion of the absolute separation between the civil and spiritual spheres by a famous comparison to a ship at sea. Christ has appointed His ministers to be unquestioned masters of the ship which is the Church. The pilot may not steer a false course or change his course at the command of the prince, who is no more than a passenger in the vessel whose sails are set towards the attainment of divine truth. And, Williams solemnly continued, if the prince persists in his attempt to handle the ship to the peril of its company, the crew may "resist and suppresse these dangerous practices of the prince and his followers, and so save the ship."[8] Similarly, the ship of State is governed absolutely by its master, the magistrate, who steers it towards safety and prosperity. He can brook no interference from the members of the Church, his passengers, in the sailing of his course. Whether the master of the civil

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 221.

[2] *Ibid.*, 224–225.

[3] *Ibid.*, 231.

[4] *Ibid.*, 237.

[5] *Ibid.*, 148.

[6] *Ibid.*, 150, 160.

[7] *Ibid.*, 239.

[8] *Ibid.*, 378.

State be pagan or Christian, his civil authority is complete. Neither enjoys authority over the souls on board, but each enjoys complete capacity to enforce order and to govern the course which the State has set.[1]

Protestantism shed the medieval conception of the relations of the Church and State only gradually and painfully. We have observed in England an Anglican philosophy which presumed a regional catholicity and which sought to cement the ties linking the Church with the State by means of a frankly Erastian administration of the National Establishment by an enlightened and undogmatic government. This theory contained rich promise of enlarged religious toleration because the leadership which disciplined the Church was secular and was resolved upon a comprehensive definition of the religious structure. The Elizabethan ideal was perverted and gravely misinterpreted by the small but powerful Anglo-Catholic party which utilized the vast power of government under a weak and unenlightened sovereign to raise up a definition of the Church which did violence both to English history and to English religious opinion. The Anglican thesis concerning the relations of Church and State brought the nation to the brink of war.

Nor did Calvinism, in its various forms, propose a more satisfactory solution. It may be argued that the Presbyterians desired to found in England a religious system which was precisely the reverse of the Anglican. They demanded a national and an exclusive Church; they remained passionately convinced that the magistrate had large and positive capacities in the Church; and they desired an intimate union between the functions of the secular and spiritual spheres. They differed from Anglicanism in their insistence that, in the last analysis, the civil State must rule the Church as the agent of the ministry. The conservative Independents, too, were entrapped by the fatal attractions which the conception of a National Church has for the pious and traditional mind. A national religious order appeared to many thoughtful Englishmen to afford the only preventative against the complete dissolution of Protestant thought and unity. In a desperate effort to check the steady erosion of the theological structure of Protestantism these men reached into the armoury of the past for weapons which had long since lost their efficacy. It was the peculiar role of Roger Williams to denounce the panaceas of orthodoxy as inimical to religion and fatal to civil peace, and to call men to face courageously the problems of the present in an atmosphere of liberty and free enquiry.

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 399–400.

c. "*The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*"

The weight of Williams's argument was addressed to the destruction of the "Bloudy Tenent of Persecution," which the great sectary regarded as a malignant growth in the body of religion and as a hideous blemish in the structure of Christian civilization. As an astute critic has indicated, he undertook to trace the grim history of persecution in the effort to prove that it had been the chief cause of human misery and wrong.[1] Williams pursued the dark spectre of persecution with wrathful invective and with a passionate logic which laid bare its origins and demanded its destruction. He was so utterly absorbed in the assault upon intolerance that, as we shall notice later, he failed to undertake a systematic exposition of the doctrine of toleration which he desired to replace it. Religious liberty is the inferential by-product of Williams's epical holy war against the evils of persecution.

Williams makes it clear in the early pages of the *Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* that he has undertaken a classical denunciation of a doctrine which has become engrafted in the Christian philosophy. The blood of thousands of innocent souls, Protestants and Catholics alike, has been spilled upon altars which have not been reared to Christ. He sought to prove by "pregnant Scripture and arguments" that the positions which the orthodox had raised to fortify their intolerance have no place in the religion of Christ.[2] England, he wrote in 1644, stands at the cross-roads. A great war has been waged to free the human spirit, and Parliament must secure the liberty of men to walk freely in the way of peace and freedom of conscience. Previous Parliaments have changed the yoke of spiritual oppression but the revolutionary body must destroy it.[3] England must be brought to realize that persecution is the most heinous sin and wrong in the modern world. The wisdom and experience of all the ages testify that no "long liv'd fruit of peace or righteousnesse" ever grew "upon that fatall tree."[1] Christ denounced no wrong with such scathing indictments as the coercion of the human conscience, which should rest free and receptive before His gospel. Yet the Church has been the prey of narrow and rigid sectarian groups which have endeavoured to force all men into churches of their own creation.

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[1] Mackinnon, *History of Modern Liberty*, III, 475–476.

[2] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, *Pref.* (1).

[3] *Ibid.*, 7–9.

Righteous men have grown weary and gloomy before the failure of Christendom to understand the essential meaning of Christ's teachings. Even England in the midst of a war to destroy one species of intolerance seems disposed to embrace the cross of another. "Who can now but expect that after so many scores of yeares preaching and professing of more truth, and amongst so many great contentions amongst the very best of Protestants, a fierie furnace should be heat, and who sees not now the fires kindling?"[2] The liberty which is implicit in the Protestant Reformation will turn to vinegar in men's mouths if it is not implemented by freedom of enquiry and absolute freedom of worship. The Church, indeed Christianity, can be conceived in no larger terms than the individual with whose salvation it is exclusively concerned. Every man must be invested with liberty to seek his salvation in his own way. "In vain have English parliaments permitted English Bibles in the poorest English houses, and the simplest man or woman to search the Scriptures, if they should be forced (as if they lived in Spaine or Rome it selfe without the sight of a Bible) to beleeve as the church beleeves."[3] Protestantism can claim no advance over Catholicism until it vindicates without reservation the liberty upon which it is presumed to rest.

Williams's definition of persecution is clear and unequivocal. There is none of the subtle evasion concerning heresy and blasphemy which normally hedged the pronouncements of orthodoxy. He stated simply: "I acknowledge that to molest any person, Jew or gentile, for either professing doctrine, or practising worship meerly religious or spirituall, it is to persecute him," even if his doctrine or worship is false, or is presumed to be false.[1] This definition includes with considered care both religious toleration and freedom of worship within the province of Christian liberty. It adds to the momentous Elizabethan recognition of liberty of belief the final logical conclusion of liberty of worship. It denounces the interference by any authority with man's spiritual beliefs as a persecution unwarranted by natural reason or by divine truth. Williams states the case of toleration without reservation.

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[1] [Williams], *Queries of highest consideration*, 35.

[2] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 12.

[3] *Ibid.*, 13.

With this revolutionary definition always threading through his thought, Williams proceeded to an examination and denunciation of the philosophy and fruits of religious repression. In all ages those who have pleaded the cause of truth have been trampled down by the engines of intolerance. They have been destroyed by men who pleaded Moses, and not Christ, in warrant for their tyranny.[2] These imperious spirits have customarily wrapped their own consciences in tender cloths while outraging the consciences of others. All men have been their prey, all truth has stood still before their awful presumption of infallibility. "Are all the thousands of millions . . . of consciences, at home and abroad, fuel only for a prison, for a whip, for a stake, for a gallows?"[3] The persecutors have persisted in their satanic zeal despite the fact that Christ has armed His truth with none other than spiritual weapons.[4] The blood of those who have stood steadfast for Christ "hath beene spilt like water upon the earth, and that because they have held fast the truth and witnesse of Jesus, against the worship of the state and times, compelling to an uniformity of state religion."[5] The earth has been "made drunk with the bloud of its inhabitants" slaughtering each other with indiscriminate zeal in the effort of each sect to aggrandize itself at the expense of all others. Unless reason and charity intervene, this holocaust can have no other consequence than the ruin of the Church and the devastation of the civil society. The future both of the

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 63.

[2] *Ibid.*, 58.

[3] *Williams to Endicott* (1651), *Letters*, 216.

[4] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 59; *The bloudy tenent yet more bloody*, 145, 147–149, 161.

[5] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 60.

Church and of civilization depends upon the immediate destruction of the beast of persecution.

No Christian would deny that religious error and seduction to error are hideous sins beside which the worst civil offences stand pale. But we are not given remedy for these ills. We must stay our hands with scrupulous care since God has reserved judgment in these cases to Himself alone. "Such a sentence no civill judge can passe, such a death no civill sword can inflict."[1] The erroneous conscience cannot be rectified by human agencies, and we stand ignorant and naïve when we attempt to assay with exactness the ore of heresy.[2] Those who persecute, therefore, not only do so against the explicit command of Almighty God, but they incur the awful risk of persecuting truth which they conceive to be error. Every man who is tempted by intolerance must enquire of himself, "Is it possible . . . that since I hunt, I hunt not the life of my Saviour, and the bloud of the Lamb of God: I have fought against many severall sorts of consciences, is it beyond all possibilitie and hazard, that I have not fought against God, that I have not persecuted Jesus in some of them?"[3]

In fine and impassioned rhetoric Williams cut away the very foundations of the persecuting logic. He sought to dissuade men from coercion by the warning that persecution enjoyed no sanction in the teachings of Christ and by invoking the realization that when men, who are fallible and limited in their knowledge of truth, persecute they outrage conscience and assail the majesty of God. At the same time, he endeavoured to demonstrate that the coercive sanction implicit in a National Establishment, which orthodoxy had sought to distinguish from persecution, could not in fact be so differentiated.

God has invested His Church with remedies which insulate it against the ravages of heresy, but He has not appointed the civil sword as its preservative.[4] Persecution can be avoided only when the magistrate withdraws unreservedly from jurisdiction in religion. The Christian ruler will scrupulously refrain from the exercise of that coercive jurisdiction which has no other issue than the destruction of souls.[1] He will be stayed by the reflection that while the sword of his authority may make "a whole nation of hypocrites," it is powerless to recover a single soul from error.[2] The intrusion of the secular power into religion beclouds God's purposes and delays the ultimate triumph of truth. The persecution which ensues endangers the security of the State,[3] and provokes the most bitter and dangerous wars to which its existence can be exposed.[4] When religious truth is confined to the frame of a National Establishment it whirls aimlessly with political circumstance without relation to the lodestone of God's truth. In no other country should this be as apparent as in England, for it "hath been Englands sinfull shame, to fashion and change their garments and religions with wondrous ease and lightnesse, as a higher power, a stronger sword hath prevailed."[5] Religion must be emancipated from the paralysing pressure of the civil sword. The hand of God is alone capable of brushing away the scales of untruth which blind men's eyes and of restoring them to their heritage which is the Kingdom of God. This delicate and precious benefit can never be attained unless men are left free. We thwart the very means of God's redeeming mercy when we fasten men irrevocably in their errors through the brutal rage and pressure of persecution.[6] No man can be convinced that a religion is true which requires such instruments of violence to uphold it.[7]

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 125.

[2] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 508–510.

[3] *Ibid.*, 515.

[4] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 127.

The evil tentacles of the persecuting philosophy have gripped the minds and spirits of the arrogant and wilful with such tenacity that Williams despaired of their release. The heresies of today become the enforced orthodoxies of tomorrow.[8] The roots of persecution are to be found deep in the psychology of all men who seek to clothe their own human ambitions and selfish plans with the faultless mantle of Christ. All who differ from this self-constituted orthodoxy are denominated heretics and blasphemers. "This is the outcry of the pope and prelates, and of the Scotch Presbyterians, who would fire all the world, to be avenged on the sectarian heretics, the blasphemous heretics, the seducing heretics." The sword of Cromwell, Williams wrote in 1651, alone stood between England and a rage of ferocious persecution and bitter war between rival orthodoxies.[1] Men will not learn; persecution itself has not dissolved the hard kernel of malice and pride in men, once under the yoke, who have gained freedom.

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 131–132, 135.

[2] *Ibid.*, 136.

[3] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 70, 175, 179.

[4] *Ibid.*, 328–329, 440.

[5] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 137.

[6] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 226, 474.

[7] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 139.

[8] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 208–209, 220–221.

Yet, Williams concluded with awful strictures which mount up in a fine cadence of eloquence, persecution must be destroyed if religion itself is not to perish. It is the most iniquitous of all human evils. It is blasphemy against the God of Peace, "who hath of one bloud, made all mankinde, to dwell upon the face of the earth."[2] It wars on Christ, who would have men saved by gentleness and persuasion. It has crucified Christ anew and has raised up a scourge "which no uncleannes, no adulterie, incest, sodomie, or beastialitie can equall, this ravishing and forcing . . . the very soules and consciences of all the nations and inhabitants of the world."[3] It has burdened the consciences of the pious and has forced the weak into hypocrisy. It withdraws from men the means through which Christ may be gained; it "burnes up the holy Scriptures, and forbids them . . . to be read in English, or that any tryall or search, or (truly) free disquisition be made by them: when the most able, diligent and conscionable readers must pluck forth their own eyes, and be forced to reade by the . . . cleargies spectacles."[4] It kindles wars and confusion; it debases the civil ruler to the execution of the will of the clergy; and it lays waste the consciences of the regenerate and the lost alike. It destroys the most flourishing commonwealths, drives resolute men into exile, and despoils the essence not only of religious truth but of common justice.[5]

Williams's rhetoric swept with the force of a clean, strong wind through the ruined halls of the once fair structure which persecution had laid waste. He wrote with the heat of a man moved by a relentless and indomitable conviction. We have observed that he had encumbered his renunciation of religious coercion by no reservations. Civilization, he argued, must choose, and that quickly, between persecution and absolute liberty. Persecution has long been a chronic cancer gnawing at the vitals both of the civil society and of the Church, but it had attained a malignancy in the English Wars and in the Thirty Years' War which threatened the very continuation of civilized life. Williams called his readers to a relentless crusade against the iniquity which religious coercion had wrought in their own and former ages, and summoned them to face the uncertainties of an unplotted and revolutionary future with the steady conviction that religious liberty enjoyed the sanction not only of divine prescription but of common sense and political necessity. From the fires which had devastated Western Europe for a full century, he mused not too optimistically, there might emerge a cleaner, a purer, and a more enlightened civil and religious order. Christendom, he clearly felt, faced with uncertain balance and decision the immediate necessity of a choice between toleration and destruction. It can be said of Williams that he added not inconsiderable weight in that balance which was to incline before his life was out in the direction of a nobler and a more spacious freedom.

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[1] *Williams to Endicott* (1651), *Letters*, 216–217.

[2] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 493.

[3] *Ibid.*, 495.

[4] *Ibid.*, 496.

[5] *Ibid.*, 498.

d. The problem of heresy and error

The refusal of the Christian to employ the arms of persecution does not mean that he is insensitive to the existence of error or unaware of its hideous nature. It means rather that he has resolved to treat it with the spiritual remedies at his disposal, to approach its cure with humility and charity, and to eschew all methods likely to harden the heretic in his error or to destroy him. Even the heathen peoples understood that conscience must be left inviolate.[1] The human mind is staggered and sickened by the implications of the doctrine of persecution. Ideally, those who persecute would destroy all those who differ in faith from the self-appointed prescriptions of the orthodox, "and then what heapes upon heapes in the slaughter houses and shambles of civill warres must the world come to."[1] Human wisdom can draw no exact line between truth and error. Even God's own people have erred in the fundamentals of faith with every assurance of resolved consciences. The errors which afflict the human spirit can be cured by the revealing light of God's truth, which can persuade and revive men only when they are left free and undisturbed.

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 264–267.

The orthodox theorists had frequently sought to distinguish between error passively held, which might be tolerated, and error which men sought to disseminate.[2] Williams alleged hotly that the distinction was without meaning and masked a persecuting disposition in the garb of charity. For the persecuting mind will accuse all who disagree with it of wilful arrogance and heretical zeal. God's saints have commonly been persecuted under this very indictment. The impact of truth upon error will inevitably create dissensions and divisions, but these temporary evils cannot be alleviated by the intervention of the civil power.[3] Religious dissension flames up into civil commotion when the illegitimate weapon of persecution is grasped to extinguish "such doctrines or practices by weapons of wrath and blood, whips, stockes, imprisonment, banishment, death." It is then that "the towne is in an uproare, and the country takes the alarum to expell that fog or mist of errour, heresie, blasphemy . . . with swords and guns; whereas tis light alone, even light from the bright shining sunne of righteousnesse, which is able, in the soules and consciences of men to dispell and scatter such fogges and darknesse."[4] The Christian world must be brought to realize that persecution entrenches and solidifies irremediably the very evil which it undertakes to extirpate. Not only is it criminal and impious; it is without efficacy.

We can proceed with violent means against heresy and error only when we labour under the fatal delusion that the foundations of our own faith are infallible. All men agree that Christ's truth must not be persecuted. The persecutors have commonly claimed so clear and certain a knowledge of Christian faith that they need not hesitate for fear they mistake differences of judgment for heresy. This has been the "pretended bulwark" of the "bloody wolves."[1] No human being possesses such transcendent knowledge of God's truth. But if he did—and here Williams cuts deep—he would know first that Christ has invested His Church with none but spiritual weapons and has explicitly declared excommunication to be the ultimate remedy against heresy.[2] We must confine the heretic to the spiritual prison of excommunication, but we may not proceed against him physically. Those who have arrogated to themselves the claim of infallible knowledge have not only borrowed prisons from the magistrate but have "wrung the keyes out of the magistrates hands, and hung them at their own girdles . . . ."[3] Even when the Church is godly and the heresy real, spiritual pains constitute the extreme limits of its discipline. Violent courses can have none but an evil consequence. For if an accused man be an heretic in the hands of persecutors, "he disputes in feare, as the poor theefe: the mouse disputes with a terrible persecuting cat: who while she seemes to play and gently tosse, yet the conclusion is a proud insulting and devouring crueltie." And, similarly, if the accused man be a faithful witness of truth, "disputes he not as a lambe in the Lyons paw, being sure in the end to be torne in pieces?"[4]

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 270.

[2] *Ibid.*, 74–75. He is here criticizing Cotton's remarks in this connection.

[3] *Ibid.*, 76–80.

[4] *Ibid.*, 80–81.

This is not the way of Christ, or of His followers. The Christian will remain humble, tolerant, and thankful in the light which God has bestowed upon him. He will patiently and charitably wait for the spread of God's truth amongst men whom he believes to be lost. He will recall that God's Church rests in divine hands and not in the hands of his own fallible wisdom. When men spurn and oppose the progress of truth he will do no more than pray "that out of them Gods elect may be called."[5] He will be far "from passing the sentence of death upon the least of the little ones of Jesus, (notwithstanding their spirituall weaknes, and sicknesses)."[6] He will wait upon the wisdom of the Lord and will shrink from the persecution of the errors of other men for fear that his own feet may be mired in heresy and his own eyes blinded by error.

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 84.

[2] *Ibid.*, 91.

[3] *Ibid.*, 274.

[4] *Ibid.*, 277.

[5] *Ibid.*, 93.

[6] Williams, Roger, *Experiments of spiritual life & health, and their preservatives, etc.* (L., 1652), 4.

Williams was far from condoning heresy and error. But he taught that mortal knowledge in these matters was extremely limited, that there was little the Christian can do to secure their reduction, and certainly nothing that the State can do about it. If God can tolerate idolatry and heresy, surely we can.[1] The Church should rear high walls to protect its internal purity and its own discipline, sealing itself against the inroads of error. Its own internal discipline should be rigidly severe.[2] But those who are without the Church or who have been excluded from it are the tares that must be left for the final harvest.[3] We must leave them standing not only to prevent the plucking up of the good grain with the chaff but to prevent the destruction of the civil State through the wars and dissensions engendered by persecution.[4] Faith will rest most secure and the civil society will be grounded on its firmest foundations when we leave to God those things that are God's and content ourselves with the quest for a fuller and richer knowledge of that truth wherein we find peace and salvation.

A brooding scepticism permeates Williams's consideration of the problem of heresy and error. He was deeply imbued with the sectarian ideal of a Church gathered up from the infinite marshes of sin and error by God's especial mercy and providence. This tiny knot of the godly enjoys the leadership and truth of God, dwelling aloof from the hosts of the lost who encompass it. Williams never stresses the typically Protestant faith in the implicit power of God's truth to conquer error. He rather counsels Christians to withdraw into churches formed of the regenerate, to preserve themselves from error by the walls of excommunication, and to leave the awful problem of the lost in God's hands. His reading of history taught him that certainty of truth had deluded men and had entrapped them in a disposition to impress that truth upon others. Truth, he suggested, should be subjectively, almost passively, held. We will gain all we need, fulfil our own destiny, if that truth which we possess accomplishes our salvation. Other men must find it in the same way by seeking the same end. Williams's pessimism, while it betokens the irreparable damage which relativism and sectarianism had done to the structural rigidity and the theological certainty of Calvinism, swept before it every impediment to the acceptance of the theory of toleration.

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 166.

[2] In fact, Williams would apparently excommunicate persons who kneel during the Lord's Supper, who observe the Christmas rites, and who practice other "popish" superstitions. ([Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 100–101.) But the punishment should be purely spiritual.

[3] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 110–116.

[4] *Ibid.*, 169–170.

e. The theory of toleration

Williams did not undertake a careful or systematic defence of toleration. His theory of religious liberty may be said to be implicit in all of his writings and to follow as a corollary from his masterly demolition of the doctrine of persecution. Williams distinguished clearly and deliberately between religious toleration, which he regarded as inevitable if Church and State were to survive, and liberty of conscience, which he held to be desirable if both Church and State were to attain their ultimate fulfilment. He declared liberty of conscience to be a natural and fundamental right which has never been surrendered to the State and which, in fact, lies wholly beyond its proper jurisdiction.[1] His theory of religious liberty was rooted in the firm conviction that the sphere of Church and State must be entirely separated and that all elements of compulsion must be withdrawn from religious life and organization. "Even morality, as far as it is regulated by law, should be kept separate from the religious holiness demanded by the church."[2] Never in the seventeenth century was this separation of function, so essential in the development of religious liberty, more clearly or precisely envisaged. Finally, it should be indicated that in Williams's theory there were no reservations, no saving clauses of vague content, to vitiate the force of his arguments. Williams was prepared to face the wilderness of sectarian individualism which stems inevitably from religious liberty with equanimity and with serene confidence.

The Church, Williams argued, should perform its rites and extend its teachings under conditions of absolute liberty, eschewing, in its turn, the slightest coercion upon those who are without its communion. It must resolutely emancipate itself from the pernicious evils of enforced uniformity which it has inherited.[1] It will rely upon the magistrate for nothing more than the protection from violence which its members rightfully claim as members of the civil society. The true Church will avoid the political favour of the magistrate and will constantly recall that the structure of a National Church depending upon enforced uniformity is expressly contrary to God's Word.[2] No matter how seductive the prospects of a state religion may appear it will be avoided as a prison, for "who hath not found a pallace a prison, when forc't to keepe within it?" Even the true faith, directly ordained by God, "is a torment to that soule and conscience, that is forc't against its owne free love and choice, to embrace and observe it."[3] The fatal embrace of enforced conformity has caused the ruin of the Church and has implemented the slaughter of millions of souls that were precious to Christ.[4] The true Church will seek no other sanction than its own truth, defend itself by no other weapons than those with which Christ has armed it.

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[1] Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, I, 71–72.

[2] Smith, Preserved, *A History of Modern Culture* (N.Y., 1930), I, 491.

Religious toleration does not, however, leave the Church unprotected. The men and women who comprise it have experienced a spiritual regeneration which binds them to God by indissoluble ties. As an institution it is encircled by a spiritual wall which protects it from its mortal enemies without, while its spiritual preoccupation ensures the State of quiet civil conduct.[5] It refrains as part of its ethic from the forcible compulsion of men, thereby protecting the State from the ravaging ill of persecution and factional aggrandizement. The Church stills the rage of persecution by cleansing its thought and policy of "such unchristian practices, toward all that is man, capable of a religion and a conscience . . . ."[6] The fatal strife between Catholics and Protestants may well be assuaged when the implication and content of the doctrine of toleration are understood. For "it is but humanity, it is but Christianity to exercise meeknesse and moderation to all men."[1] Every man must be extended a complete liberty to try all things and to seek God in his own way. The Christian Church must be brought to realize that the slightest compulsion may well force men to accept that which they do not understand or that which they do not in conscience believe.[2] Compulsion, even the orthodox admit, cannot make Christians. Its effect is rather to destroy what religion men do have. Religious compulsion, however slight, is a "notorious and common pyrate, that takes and robbs, that fires and sinkes the (spirituall shipps and vessels) the consciences of all men, of all sorts, of all religions and perswasions whatsoever."[3] England must frame a liberty of conscience which not only rests upon political necessity but is rooted in the "equity and piety" which commend it as the only environment in which the gospel can be truly taught and freely received.

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution, Pref.* (3–4).

[2] *Ibid.*, 284–285.

[3] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 439.

[4] [Williams], *Queries of highest consideration*, 35.

[5] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 286–287.

[6] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 26.

Religious liberty will yield a rich harvest of security to the State and transcendent spiritual blessings to the Church. The factions which persecution and clerical ambition have bred will be cured and Christianity may attain by tolerance the catholicity which bigotry has shattered. The great religious factions[4] not only have torn the seamless robe of Christ, but in their demands for exclusive hegemony over conscience have brought the State to the verge of ruin.[5] They have persecuted each other and have sought to win the approbation of the magistrate in order to secure the destruction of their rivals. They plead lustily "for mercie to mens consciences, when them selves are in the grates, and pits, and under hatches,"[6] only to exhibit their essential intolerance and fiendish bigotry once they have attained hope of mastery. When the State enforces religious liberty upon all men and all sects, these factional distempers will evaporate. Men will have no other defence, no other instrument of aggression, than the "two-edged sword of the spirit," with which the issue of truth and error will be finally resolved. From the shadows and mire of factional greed and cruelty a new and more glorious catholicity will be reared on the solid foundations of toleration. The Church will be revivified and unshackled when its spiritual nature is asserted and its spiritual weapons are refurbished.

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[1] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 28.

[2] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 290.

[3] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 5.

[4] Williams names four factions: the Catholics, the Anglicans, the Presbyterians, and the Independents. (*Bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 519–529.) It is interesting to notice that his most damaging accusation against the Independents was based upon their intolerance in securing the ejection of Anglican and Presbyterian ministers. All men should be left free to preach Christ.

[5] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 519.

[6] *Ibid.*, 522.

Men must be brought to a fuller realization of the completely spiritual nature of religion, and the Church must conceive of itself spiritually before the priceless benefits of religious liberty may be won. The Church releases but reluctantly the sword of coercion which it dumbly grasps with the paralysed arm of persecution. It must relinquish the sword of force in full realization that Christ has provided it with adequate resources against heresy and error. "Those churches cannot be truly Christian . . . which either actually themselves, or by the civill power of kings and princes . . . doe persecute such as dissent from them or be opposite against them."[1] The Church possesses spiritual remedies with which it can maintain its own purity, and beyond that it cannot go.[2] The assistance of temporal power is not required in the warfare which it wages; its own spiritual weapons are omnicompetent.[3] The sword of coercion cannot touch the godly conscience, nor is it effective against the man who is dead in sin. A dead man cannot be killed.[4] The wolves of error which assail the Church are to be spiritually and mystically slain. Christ never intended that they should "be killed, their braines dasht out with stones, staves, halberts, guns."[5] Those men who violate the spiritual nature of Christ's message by the bloody arms of persecution make Him a temporal king by force, destroy His people, and delay the "sweet end of the comming of the Lord Jesus . . . to save mens soules . . .

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 191.

[2] *Ibid.*, 192, 193; *Queries of highest consideration*, 27.

[3] [Williams], *The bloody tenent, of persecution*, 200; *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 246–247, 256–257, 260–261, 280, 292, 319, 353–354.

[4] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 208.

[5] *Ibid.*, 145.

by his own blood."[1] The Church of Christ must seek in religious liberty penance for the wrongs which have been committed in the name of Christ and press towards the attainment of His Kingdom with the mighty gospel with which He has secured it.

Williams would admit no reservations to the toleration for which he pleaded so eloquently. Men must be left free to seek Christ in their own way, and the Church, he held, should not dare even to contrive a doctrinal system which might be imposed by suggestion or prescription upon conscience. He distrusted completely the efforts which his Calvinistic colleagues were undertaking at Westminster to define the fundamentals of faith. Such definitions are but a prelude to the coercive enforcement of a religious truth which a group of fallible men have elaborated to their personal satisfaction. He did propose, in vague terms to which no Christian of his period would have taken exception, certain teachings which appear to have universal validity.[2] But he hastened to point out that no definition of essential truth can have more than a subjective and relative meaning. Our knowledge of truth unfolds but slowly and is, at best, held feebly. God's chosen are scattered in all churches, in all ages, and in all nations. Any rigid definition of saving faith condemns not only men who are now in error and who will in the end be saved,[3] but likewise "the generation of the righteous, who have been generally for many generations ignorant of the Christian way of worship."[4] Doctrinal formulae, therefore, are both dangerous and unnecessary. Salvation is gained by individuals, not by Churches. The man who experiences regeneration gains from God a knowledge of truth sufficient for his own salvation, but he will not dare prescribe that truth to other men or to other ages. The daring and almost anarchistic sweep of Williams's argument is most clearly revealed in this amazing contribution to spiritual freedom. His theory really destroys the constitution not only of the organized Church but of the organized congregation. The Church is composed of men who have experienced regeneration and who worship God in thanksgiving and humility. But this relationship has little structural essence beyond association. The saint is bound only to God through the subjective experience of miraculous conversion. No authority can intrude into the awful intimacy of that relationship.

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[1] [Williams], *The bloody tenent, of persecution*, 146; *et cf. Letters*, 225–228.

[2] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 65; *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 21.

[3] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 64.

[4] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 61.

Williams had vindicated the benefits which accrue both to the State and to the Church when the principles of religious liberty are embraced. In his discussion of the relations of Church and State he had dwelt at length upon the stability, strength, and security which are gained by the State that divorces itself completely from the sectarian strife in which it engages at its own peril. Religious toleration, he reminded England, likewise promotes the economy of a nation. The history of Holland has demonstrated this as axiomatic, and in Holland Amsterdam, which has been the strongest citadel of religious toleration, has reaped the richest material rewards. There has descended upon Holland a "confluence of the persecuted" which drew "boats, drew trade, drew shipping, and that so mightily in so short a time, that shipping, trading, wealth, greatnesse, honour . . . have appeared to fall as out of heaven in a crown or garland upon the head of that poor fisher town."[1] Yet Holland has not gained the full benefits of religious liberty, since the Arminians and the Catholics still labour under restraints. England still enjoys the opportunity to "out-shoot and teach their neighbours" by extending unrestricted liberty of worship to men of all persuasions.[2] The civil and spiritual benefits which would flow from such a reformation have been historically vindicated. The economic gains which are the inevitable by-product of liberty of conscience should likewise not be ignored.

Every counsel of religion and policy, therefore, inclined Williams to advocate religious liberty as the model towards which the Christian world should aspire. He defended it with every argument which could be bent to his purpose and supported it with logical considerations which society could ill afford to ignore. He met the difficult problems which toleration presented to an age nurtured in the traditions of uniformity with candour, honesty, and a disarming sincerity. There are no evasions, no sectarian shifts in his thinking. And finally, Williams met the most difficult and decisive test of seventeenth century tolerance in his unequivocal demand that the benefits of toleration should be extended beyond the confines of the historically Protestant groups to men of all or of no religious persuasion.

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[1] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 9.

[2] *Ibid.*, 11.

All men who do not break the civil peace should be protected in absolute freedom of belief and worship whether they be Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Turks, or pagans.[1] The true Church will permit men to continue in unbelief or in false belief so long as they do not contravene the civil laws. There is no spiritual offence which can possibly justify the ruinous intervention of persecution in religious affairs. For false religion which lies without the Church can do the pious man no graver damage than poison which is not taken, nor will it harm the State save as its adherents happen to be bad subjects.[2] The Church has security in its internal discipline against the infection of heresy; the State guards itself against civil disturbances by the legitimate punishment of breaches of its laws. When the awful curse of persecution is lifted, the Church may at last proceed to repair the ravages that have laid it waste and to redeem men by "free conferrings, disputings and preachings of the Gospel of truth."[3]

There resides in all men of all faiths a fine devotion of conscience which betokens that faith which is the essence of religion. Thus Williams spoke with warm admiration of the noble death of Father Hartley whose faith as a Catholic could not be shaken by torture and death.[4] Those who would crush such resolved consciences would "turn up all roots, and lay all level and in blood" in their frenzied zeal to enthrone their own bigotry.[1] Satan deludes men into the awful error of canonizing their own opinions into infallible truths. The pious man is an humble and tolerant man. Thus Williams commended the temper of Jeremy Taylor, who in his *Liberty of Prophesying* had "excellently asserted the toleration of different religions, yea, in a respect, that of the papists themselves, which is a new way of soul freedom, and yet is the old way of Christ Jesus."[2] All men must have liberty to seek Christ in their own way, free from the dictation of the "holy and learned" who strive so eagerly to impose their wills.[3] All men must be left free before the judgment and mercy of God.

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[1] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 3–4, 142–143, 197, *et passim; The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 313–316; *Queries of highest consideration*, 27, *et passim; Mr. Cottons letter*, 77.

[2] [Williams], *The bloudy tenent, of persecution*, 198.

[3] Williams, *The bloody tenent yet more bloody*, 316.

[4] Williams probably refers here to Fr. William Hartley, an Elizabethan priest. Hartley, a native of Nottinghamshire, was for some time a member of Saint John's College, Oxford. He was closely associated with Campion, and in 1584 was deported with him and other priests. Wood (*Athenae Oxonienses*) does not mention his subsequent return or death.

Williams is perhaps the strangest of a group of human spirits dislodged from traditional moorings by the hurricane of civil war and ecclesiastical disruption. The mind of one age always grapples dimly and feebly to engage the mind and spirit of a former age; when the attention is focused on a revolutionary and completely individualistic genius like Williams the task is almost insuperable. In the thought of Williams, considered both mad and incendiary by the orthodox in his own day, the modern mind discovers a kind of prescience, a kind of divination which taught him that the world was entering a new stage in which religious persecution must be abandoned as ineffective and as intolerably dangerous. Williams, in his voluminous denunciations of the iniquity of persecution, clung doggedly to a few principles upon which religious liberty has come to rest. He saw clearly that the civil State would be destroyed unless it withdrew from the sectarian bitterness and the clashing ambitions of rival orthodoxies which had for a century engulfed the Western world. He demonstrated to the satisfaction of reasonable men that persecution was in itself impious and destructive to the very essence of religious life. He posed a conception of religion, starkly mystical, intensely subjective, and wholly individualistic, before which religious liberty acquired the rich dignity of positive virtue. Roger Williams pleaded not for religious toleration but for religious liberty as the birthright of all men, whether pagan or Christian. His theology was ill-formed, chaötic, and subjective. But out of its very relativism, its proud assertion that men needed no more than the inward assurance of grace, flowed the strong necessity for freedom. There is in Williams's thought a complete honesty, an ultimate kind of logic which led him to accept without reservation the full implications of disorganization and ecclesiastical disintegration which the seventeenth century mind was discovering were implicit in religious liberty. He discarded the past without nostalgia to embrace the future in the assurance of a larger freedom and a nobler fulfilment of Christ's will.

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[1] *Williams to Endicott, Letters*, 220.

[2] Williams, *Letters*, 249. This letter, written while Williams was in England in 1652–1653, was addressed to Mrs. Sadleir, a daughter to Sir Edward Coke. Mrs. Sadleir's testy and orthodox reply was that she had read Taylor and had found the *Liberty of Prophesying* not to her stomach. "I say," she wrote, "it and you would make a good fire." (Williams, *Letters*, 252.)

[3] Williams, *Letters*, 223, *et vide Letter to the Town of Providence* (1654–1655), *ibid.*, 279.

5. William dell, 1607?–1664

William Dell, like Roger Williams, was so completely individualistic in his thought that he can be regarded as a Baptist only with proper reservations. Dell possessed one of the finest minds of his century, though it lacked the hard and vigorous quality necessary for contributions of the first order. He was a man of no party, his spirit was mystical and elusive, and his thought was permeated by a brooding gentleness and charity. Educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, Dell became in 1631 secretary to Laud. Somewhat later he abandoned the Church of England to embrace a liberal position which owed much both to Arminianism and to mysticism. Dell evidenced no interest in the niceties of sectarian differences, regarding himself as a member of a broadly based Church which included the regenerate scattered in all communions and sects. During the Civil War he was a singularly effective chaplain in the army, and opposed with all the resources at his command the attempt of the Presbyterians to establish an exclusive and infallible National Church in England. In a number of influential works he endeavoured to prove that a national religious

Establishment was ruinous not only to the true Church but to the religious liberty with which it must be endowed. "He thought, that no power belonged to the church and clergy, but what is spiritual; and took pains to shew, that the blending of the civil and ecclesiastical powers together has constantly been the method of setting up a spiritual tyranny."[1] Dell was a gifted preacher and two of his sermons before Parliament were courageously critical of the course of the determinations in the Assembly.[2] In 1649 he was made master of Caius College, Oxford, where he continued until the Restoration. Despite his academic connections and large learning, Dell in this later period went farther than most of his Baptist colleagues in denouncing the requirements of formal training for the ministry. His thought was intensely spiritual and unfettered, and, like so many of the outstanding figures in this period of theological disintegration, he advanced to a position of personal independence which can best be described as non-sectarian.[3]

The sources of Dell's fine tolerance are to be found in his spiritual conception of the Church and in his firm insistence that every human being must have absolute liberty in seeking God. The true Church, he held, consists of the regenerate who have found God and who associate, formally or informally, in His worship. This view of the Church precludes all coercion, presumes religious liberty as the first essential of religious life, and denies the basic assumptions of the traditional State-Church ideal. The State Church, from which alone persecution can flow, was in Dell's view the consequence of a tragic confusion of the disparate ends of civil and religious life. It is based, further, upon the false premise that the Jewish ecclesiastical organization retains efficacy in the Christian world. The Jewish Church sought no more than a formal uniformity, whereas Christ demands spiritual perfection of all the members of His Church. That is to say, the Christian Church represents a vast advance over the national and exclusive Church-State ideal. Those who retain the nostalgia for the outmoded religious organization flounder hopelessly in the path of Moses. External conformity, enforced by the clergy or the secular power, cannot bestow upon men that righteousness which Christ requires.[1] The kingdom which Christ has ordained is a spiritual kingdom and His religion can be inculcated by none other than spiritual means. The truly spiritual (Christian) Church is established "not by an outward power or force, or armies, or fortifications, or factions or confederacies, all these are but a staffe of reed," but by righteousness.[2] This Church can gather in the regenerate only when its work and organization are not obscured and confounded by persecution and restraint. External forms and coercive pressure cannot fabricate the perfect timbers of Christ's edifice. "Civil ecclesiastical reformation makes a man clean outwardly, with an outward confession of faith, when inwardly he is all filthy through unbelief."[3] Religious persecution and intolerance, consequently, not only have no place in the true Church, but are grievously inimical to its development and fulfilment.

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[1] Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, I, 323.

[2] We are told that his great sermon on *Right Reformation*, preached to Parliament in November, 1646, so exercised Christopher Love that on the afternoon of the same day he put aside his prepared sermon in order to denounce Dell's defence of toleration and to assail the Baptist conception of the spiritual Church. (Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, I, 330.)

[3] Dell has usually been regarded as a Baptist; *vide* Crosby, Calamy, Neal, and L. F. Brown.

Men are won to Christ's Church only through the miracle of His intervention in their lives, and it is not Christ's way to "grieve them, and vex them, and oppress them, and crush them to pieces."[4] The Christian Church can do no more than maintain itself in spotless purity, preach the gospel, and implement by its spiritual resources the play of religious truth upon men's lives. For no man can make a Christian and no government can make a Church. Thus Dell eloquently informed Parliament in 1646 that though it "did well, in that it was in your heart to reform the Kingdom of God . . . nevertheless you shall not reform it, for you have been men of war . . . but Christ the prince of peace, he shall reform the Church of God."[5]

Complete religious liberty was implicit in Dell's fine insistence upon the subjective nature of true faith. Men can gain a knowledge of truth and the Church can provide the agencies of salvation only under conditions of freedom. Heresy and error have been able to root themselves because men have taken their religion at the command of authority. Thus error has been perpetuated by tyranny. Persecution has been but a tragic travesty on religion. We should know that "all the world cannot lead any man into the truth, till the spirit lead him into it: and when the spirit doth lead us into the truth, all the men in the world cannot lead us out of it."[1] The true Church is wholly spiritual and is composed of men who have been individually saved.[2] The Church and the clergy must recognize the sovereignty of every man in his unaided search for salvation.[3] When the Church has attained this degree of spiritual perception, the dissension and bitterness which have marked Christian history will instantly fall away. The presumptuous minds which seek to impose their own definitions of the mind of God will stand exposed in their charlatanry before all Christians. For when men are truly taught by God they rest at peace with one another, despite their differences, until God has revealed His truth further in those matters which are not evident.[4] Christians will wait patiently, secure in the knowledge of the Word which dwells in their hearts. For that Word has meaning only in our own spirits. "If thou live under the Word many years, and it come not into thy heart, it will never change thee."[5] The heart and mind can be won and changed only by the inward efficacy of divine truth.[6] The restraints and persecutions with which arrogant men have coerced the Christian conscience have contrived to form dead and unchristian Churches and to stifle the play of Christ's spirit upon the consciences of those whom He would save.

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[1] Dell, William, *Right reformation: or, the reformation of the church of the New Testament, represented in gospel-light, etc.* (L., 1646), 5.

[2] Dell, William, *The building and glory of the truely Christian and spiritual church, etc.* (L., 1646), 22.

[3] Dell, *Right reformation*, 7.

[4] *Ibid.*, 11.

[5] *Ibid.*, 14.

Dell's view of the spiritual and individualistic nature of faith and of the Church led him to denounce without reservation the slightest forcing of men's consciences even in the interests of true faith. He viewed with the most lively apprehension the efforts of the Presbyterians to shackle freedom of enquiry and liberty of worship in another exclusive and coercive establishment. The zeal of orthodoxy displays the erroneous conception of faith which dominates the clergy. They strive to secure no more than the outward man for whom they are preparing "so many iron yoaks" and so many snares and fetters.[1] Dell charged that they "would have the secular magistrate to have right and power to enforce men to such a religion, as himself judges true, by the help and counsel of those ministers, which himself judges orthodox."[2] Hence the very foundations of the National Church to which the Presbyterians aspire are found only in natural reason and in the accidents of historical circumstance. This Church is created by the civil sword, it lays waste the very agencies of salvation, and it imposes an impious burden upon the human conscience, whether it be godly or erroneous. This is not the reformation of Christ.

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[1] Dell, William, *Christ's spirit, a Christians strength, etc.* (L., 1645), *Works*, (L., 1817), I, 25–26.

[2] Dell, William, *The way of true peace and unity among the faithful and churches of Christ, etc.* (L., 1649), 3–9.

[3] *Moderate Intelligencer*, December 12, 1646.

[4] Dell, *The building and glory of the truely Christian and spiritual church*, 20–21.

[5] Dell, William, *Works* (L., 1773), 128.

[6] *Ibid.*, 135.

The true reformation and constitution of the Church can be secured only by destroying all restraints upon the Word and the Spirit of God.[3] Christ will not have His cause advanced by the worldly weapons of coercion. He sent forth His apostles without "any power of swords, or guns, or prisons to reform the world." He chose "poor, illiterate, mechanick men" who "turned the world upside down," revolutionizing the worship and the lives of all men with the spiritual weapons with which they had been armed.[4] The Church can attain its full power and perform its true mission only when it strips itself of the coercive authority which now saps its vitality. Religious restraint does infinite violence to the very essence of faith and must be regarded as unchristian in origin and effect.[5] The clergy have long perverted the meaning of Christianity in order to entrench themselves in an arrogant domination of conscience. The effect of this intolerance has been to put out the eyes of the Church, to enslave men, and to exalt the antichrist. This blasphemous arrogance will be instantly destroyed when men may again search the scriptures quietly and freely for the truth which will save them. Then the rotten fabric which has been supported by no other foundation than the sword will crumble before the onrush of truth and freedom.[1]

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[1] Dell, *Right reformation*, 38; *The way of true peace and unity*, 24.

[2] Dell, William, *The tryal of spirits both in teachers & hearers . . . whereunto is added a plain and necessary confutation of divers errors delivered by Mr Sydrach Simpson in a sermon . . . 1653, etc.* (L., 1653), *Works*, II, 9.

[3] Dell, *Right reformation*, 14–15.

[4] *Ibid.*, 15–16.

[5] *Ibid.*, 19–20.

Force is a human invention which enjoys no place in the Kingdom of Christ. The persecutors have been the architects of the false church of the antichrist. Men of little faith have been compelled to accept the dicta of authority and to embrace a religion to which reason and revelation have not persuaded them. "The more outward and violent power is used upon men . . . the more . . . men shall see prisons and banishments, and losse of goods, and death, walking up and down the kingdom for the reformation of the church. You shall at last have men say, Sirs, we will believe and do, even as it pleaseth you: We will believe as the state pleaseth, or we will believe as the Counsel pleaseth; and let them make what confessions they wil . . . ."[2] This is the reformation which coercion accomplishes. This is the inevitable fruit of the philosophy of persecution.

England must turn steadfastly from the delusions which power and grandeur rear in the empty formalism of the exclusive and coercive Church. The nation must build afresh upon the simple and tolerant foundations of Christian religious life. It must learn that the Church has no "earthly, or human, or secular power, no power of outward constraint and violence" in the spiritual kingdom which Christ has declared His peculiar province.[3] His ministers can plead no other brief than the necessity of salvation. They will view with compassion the evil and erroneous, and will not add the pain of temporal death for those who "refuse eternall life."[4] The Church will maintain its purity without fear of infection. It will refrain scrupulously from any persecution of error in the sure knowledge that not one iota of responsibility has been placed upon the Church for the suppression of heresy either by the example of Christ or by the injunctions of His gospel.

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[1] Dell, *The tryal of spirits*, *Works*, II, 22, 45–46.

[2] Dell, *Right reformation*, 23.

[3] Dell, *Christ's spirit*, *Works*, I, 36.

[4] Dell, *Right reformation*, 25.

England has within its grasp the possibility of accomplishing the reformation which Christ desires. The necessary condition of this reformation is the establishment of a complete religious liberty which will secure all men in the possibility of attaining salvation and which will permit the Church to unleash the spiritual weapons which lie rusting in its armoury. Under conditions of religious liberty the true Church will be permitted to stand apart from the world and from the carnal weapons of the secular power. The Church will become a purely spiritual body, exercising "a spirituall and heavenly power; seeing this power alone, and by it selfe, is able to accomplish, the whole good pleasure of God in the church, and to worke all the works in it that God hath to doe."[1] It will emancipate itself from the persecuting sanctions of the magistrate, and will include none other than regenerate and willing members.[2] It will follow the example of Christ who, though He possessed infinite power, refrained from all violence and compulsion in bringing men to the knowledge of truth. Christ will have us "to beware of false prophets, but not to destroy them; and to avoid heretics; but not to kill them: and will have neither of them burnt with any fire but the fire of love."[3] In the tolerance which He has so explicitly commanded the world will find peace and the Church will again be constituted of those who seek it willingly in the fulness of knowledge which is bestowed upon the regenerate.[4]

This view of the Church reduced the logic of orthodoxy to absurdity. Dell argued firmly that the Church required no protection against the inroads of error, since heresy would obviously be erroneous to the godly. Religious sovereignty must be vested in some area. The orthodox, Dell suggested, would vest it irretrievably in the magistrate or in the clergy, whereas Christ had clearly reposed it in the individual conscience. It is patently ridiculous to grant to the civil ruler the power of determining between religious truth and error.

[1] Dell, *The way of true peace and unity*, 88; *The stumbling-stone, or, a discourse touching that offence which the world and worldly church do take against Christ Himself, etc.* (L., 1653), *Works*, II, 42.

[2] Dell, *The way of true peace and unity*, 90–91.

[3] Dell, *The stumbling-stone, Works*, II, 47.

[4] Dell, *The way of true peace and unity*, 93.

History has demonstrated that this has meant in effect that the magistrate "will uphold his own religion and judgement to be the truth, though never so false, and will sentence whatever is contrary thereunto, to be errour though never so true."[1] Any coercive religious system, therefore, makes the truth of God dependent upon the judgment of man. Similarly, when religious sovereignty is invested in the clergy, truth depends upon fallible and transitory bases. The magistrate becomes the executioner of the Church, the clergy are enthroned in an anti-Christian arrogance, and religion becomes the pawn of circumstance. "Let all Christians take heed," Dell solemnly warned, "how they favour the magistrates with this power, to punish those, whom he judges hereticks; for if he shall change his minde, as he easily may, seeing he is but a man, or if another shall succeed him, of another minde, that very sword, may be sheathed in their own bowels, which now they draw forth against other mens."[2]

Religion can be conceived in no larger terms than the individual whose function it is to save. Man is an autonomous spiritual unit upon whose freedom and grace the institutions of religious life must be founded. But it must not be deduced that the tolerant Church of Christ is stripped of its necessary defences. Rather, it alone is seised of the spiritual weapons required for the extirpation of error. Christ foretold that the Church would be beset with false prophets. But He explicitly commanded it not "to stir up the secular power, to imprison, banish, or burn them" to the confounding of the spiritual remedies which are competent for the cure of heresy.[3] Every opinion must be heard freely and the faithful and erroneous alike must be protected in their right to accept it or reject it as they may determine.[4] The fundamental responsibility of every man is for his own salvation, and we ought therefore "to be sure ourselves, and not to trust anybody for us, in this great matter wheron depends either eternal live, or eternal death."[5]

Dell was as explicit as he was resolute in his defence of religious toleration. His theory achieves tolerance by stripping the Church and the magistrate of the last vestige of coercive power, while he attains religious liberty in his remarkable insistence upon the complete spirituality and individualism of religion. The ruler has no direct responsibility for the Church, which is concerned with a sphere of human interest into which the rude arm of his power may not intrude. The greatest blessing which he may extend to the Church is the protection of it in the tolerance so essential to its purposes. He "need not trouble himself any farther, for the word preached, will doe the rest. And let it not be doubted, but if the truth of God doe enter the lists against error, it will be infinitely able to prevaile of itself alone, without calling in any power, or borrowing any weapons from the world."[1] The civil State will guard the peace and morality of the Commonwealth by the proper sanction of its laws, but it will harm no man because of spiritual error.[2] The cement of the civil State is found in the laws which gird and preserve it as a human society; the Church gains cohesion from the grace which its members hold in Christ. The two spheres must be regarded as completely separate lest the loyalty of men to both be confounded and destroyed.

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[1] Dell, *The way of true peace and unity*, 111.

[2] *Ibid.*, 113.

[3] Dell, *The tryal of spirits*, *Works*, II, 18.

[4] *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 54–55.

[5] *Ibid.*, *Works*, II, 20.

More than casual similarity will be observed between the thought of Dell and Roger Williams. Both men were individualistic in their philosophy and both regarded religion as a spiritual phenomenon which had no meaning save as it was expressed in subjective terms. This view denied explicitly the institutional patterns of religious life and left the Church stripped of all coercive power. It is apparent that this conception of religion lies very close to the pietistic and mystical fringes of sectarianism, which found their principal expression in seventeenth century England in the thought of the Quakers and related groups. We find Protestantism resolved into its ultimate, and perhaps its logical, individualism in Dell's philosophy. He posed a highly spiritual definition of religion which demanded complete religious liberty as the corner-stone of its existence. To such thinkers spiritual coercion, proceeding from whatever quarter for whatever purpose, was both impious and brutal. This view became widely disseminated in England during the revolutionary period in the more radical wings of Protestant thought. It did extreme violence to the institutional and orderly instincts of the age and hence contributed less to the development of religious toleration than the more sober and realistic conviction of divers other groups in England that the interests of both the Church and the State demanded the cessation of religious persecution.

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[1] Dell, *The way of true peace and unity*, 115.

[2] Dell, William, *The crucified and quickened Christian, etc.* (L., 1652), *Works*, II, 15.

6. SAMUEL RICHARDSON

In the writings of Samuel Richardson the reader descends from the almost vapoury mysticism of Williams and Dell to the cool pragmatism of a prosperous London merchant. Richardson followed political and ecclesiastical developments with great acumen during an extremely critical decade, and devoted himself to the enlargement of religious liberty as the chief fruit of the revolution which England was then undergoing.

Relatively little is known concerning this interesting figure. A native of Northamptonshire, he served in the parliamentary forces as a soldier and as an army chaplain. He was a substantial London tradesman and was certainly one of the shrewdest and most influential of the Baptist leaders in the capital. He appears to have been a member of the original Particular Baptist congregation.[1] Richardson signed the three Baptist Confessions of 1643, 1644, and 1646, and was regarded both by his own Church and by the Cromwellian Government as one of the most responsible leaders of his sect. He shared the normal Baptist aversion to the formality of the Cromwellian settlement of religion and viewed with disapproval the conservative political tendencies which led to the establishment of the Protectorate. But as a prudent and responsible leader Richardson was gravely alarmed by the violence of the attacks which were launched against the Protectorate by Fifth Monarchy and other radical writers. He accordingly undertook in his *Apology*

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[1] Whitley, *London Baptists*, 103.

(1654) and in his *Plain Dealing* (1656) a spirited and influential defence of Cromwell's political and religious policy. Richardson pointed out in these works that Cromwell had secured to England the priceless benefits of religious toleration and urged that the preservation of this liberty depended upon the undivided support of the forces which had recently been combined in the parliamentary cause.[1] Richardson's able pamphlets were efficient in binding the main body of Baptist thought to the support of the Protectorate and in checking the steady erosion of the communion under the radical persuasion of the millenary groups. His writings may be regarded as having contributed significantly to the growing conservatism of Baptist political thought and they were by no means unimportant in gaining for his communion a larger measure of respectability in conservative quarters.

Richardson dealt briefly but thoughtfully with the full range of problems raised by religious liberty in the modern state. He was explicit in his consideration of the important question of the relations which should exist between the civil magistrate and the true Church. The religious activities of the Christian and his political life, Richardson held, have different sources and involve different loyalties. These attachments cannot be confused without dire consequences to both Church and State. The heritage of the interference of the magistrate in religious affairs has been the steady persecution of Christ and His Church. The ruler enjoys neither authority nor concern in spiritual capacities. "In matters religious no man may make a law, the opinions that the magistrate hath a power from God to punish hereticks with corporall punishments hath cost the blood and lives of many thousands of the precious saints and people of God."[2] The interference of the ruler in the religious life of his people can be regarded in no other light than the usurpation of an authority which God has jealously reserved to Himself.

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[1] Richardson argued that no other Government would have undertaken an honest and permanent policy of toleration. "There is no ground to believe that the people of this nation would ever have given us this freedom, or that any parliament chosen by them would ever give us this freedom, seeing the ministers and magistrates cannot see that the bond between magistrate and people is essentially civil." (Richardson, Samuel, *Plain dealing*: *or, the unvailing of the opposers of the present government and governors, etc.* (L., 1656).)

[2] Richardson, Samuel, *An apology for the present government, etc.* (L., 1654), 3.

Moreover, it should be understood by all men that the claim of the civil State to order religion presumes an infallible capacity on the part of the magistrate to determine between truth and error.[1] Common sense as well as the scriptures instructs us that neither the magistrate nor any other human being possesses such infallible knowledge. When religious authority is entrusted to the ruler, truth and error are defined in terms of strength and by the empty determinations of the majority.[2] Orthodox opinion has been amazingly impious in its fanatical determination to bind religion to the whim and unpredictable temper of the magistrate. There can be no evasion on this question. Either all princes enjoy absolute power in religion or none possesses any. Conscience can no longer be violated and destroyed by a power which is so evidently specious and arrogated. It would be a supreme irony indeed if men in England were to have the Bible as their spiritual guide yet were to be forced into the mould of an orthodox gloss.[3] The iniquitous doctrine of enforced conformity at last drove men in England to rebellion, and the gains of that sacrifice must not be destroyed by the caprice of violent men. Orthodoxy cannot produce a shred of scriptural evidence to show "that Christ's Church is to be planted by violence and bloodshed, and that Christ would have men compelled by fines and imprisonment to serve Him."[4] Belief must rest free of all compulsion, and the formal exercise of religious belief must remain unmolested by the civil State.

The confusion between the civil society and spiritual life has worked irreparable harm in the Church. Its strictly spiritual nature has been obscured by the temporal pomp with which men have endowed it and its spiritual instruments have been abandoned for the brazen weapons required for the restraint of carnal men. We should insistently recall that bodily punishments affect only the body and are hence quite powerless to amend a spiritual fault. The destruction of an heretic does not destroy his heresy and we incur in his destruction the awful risk of condemning one whom God may have chosen for salvation in due time. Surely Christendom has seen no more fantastic and iniquitous evil than the entrusting of jurisdiction over the human conscience to men who are themselves fallible.[1]

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[1] Richardson, Samuel, *An answer to the London ministers letter, etc.* (L., 1648–9), 30; *The necessity of toleration in matters of religion, or, certain questions propounded to the synod . . . with the non-conformists answer why they cannot receive and submit to the said faith* (L., 1647), 8.

[2] Richardson, *The necessity of toleration*, 11.

[3] *Ibid.*, 8.

[4] Richardson, *An answer to the London ministers letter*, 30.

Richardson viewed with equanimity the orthodox complaint that religious liberty would have the immediate effect of opening the flood-gates of error and would eventually result in the disintegration of religious truth. This argument, he held, betokens little faith indeed. It holds in light estimation the power of truth and the experience of conversion, while it exalts the prestige of error. Richardson, with the calm confidence in the faith of the regenerate so typical of sectarian thought, was cheerfully prepared to leave heresy and error to the disposition of God. Error, in short, is not our problem and it certainly need not alarm the godly. Heresy must be suffered because we must tolerate that which cannot be avoided. When God withholds light from men they must stumble in darkness.[2] We cannot interfere in the mysterious processes whereby God's plans are carried forward. And above all we must not run the risk of keeping out truth in our desperate efforts to extirpate error. No, "its better to suffer errors then to persecute the truth, and the possessors of it, alwayes by such fine pretences and glosses we have been deprived of our liberty."[3] The Church should devote its energy to the attainment of the precious benefits of liberty of religion, ignoring the feeble currents of error which lap harmlessly at its impregnable foundations. The Church must not stifle its own vitality in hysterical fear of errors which cannot possibly infect its purity. It is "a cruel reformation that hath more destruction then edification in it, its a terrible reformation there waighteth on it, confiscation of goods, fines, imprisonment, bannishment, death with fier and sword; is there no better cure of the paine of the head, then beating out ones braynes?"[1] Truth requires no assistance from violence and force in its war with error. Its arms and resources are self-contained and omnicompetent; it requires no more than the release of its powers in an environment of religious liberty so congenial to its progress and spiritual vitality.

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[1] Richardson, *The necessity of toleration*, 4–5. We have slightly expanded the argument.

[2] *Ibid.*, 16–17.

[3] Richardson, *An answer to the London ministers letter*, 28.

Richardson sketched with rapid strokes the numerous arguments which his age was advancing in support of religious toleration. His theory of toleration rested upon the conviction that truth could not be defined in rigid terms and that persecution wrought irrevocable harm both to the godly and to the heretical. Truth is never fully known or widely received. The godly have always been few in number and insignificant in power. Consequently any system of enforced uniformity is likely to regard truth as blasphemy and to validate its destruction under the name of error.[2] England has observed this awful crucifixion of truth in her own recent history and has dedicated herself to the final eradication of the evil of persecution. It is patent that conscientious men differ so radically in their judgments that no one religious system will ever be accepted by all. And "if one man is to be punished for his errors, then all men must be punished, because no man is free from error; all truth is not among one sort of men; there is no man doth judge his own judgement erroneous." No man has ever embraced error deliberately and Christ has protected all men from corporal pains while they are mired in disbelief. "Wee must suffer that which wee cannot help, necessity hath no law; it is no more in our power to hinder errors than it was in the bishops power to hinder mens speaking and writing against them."[3] Only the miracle of conversion can wrest men from the toils of error, and the intrusion of the slightest force is calculated to thwart and paralyse the sole means which we have for gaining salvation. Religious liberty is therefore essential to the very existence of the Christian faith.

The reformation which Christ desires has long been delayed by the arm of coercion and persecution. We perceive but dimly the Church which Christ founded because its growth and composition have been so stunted by the want of the rich soil of liberty in which it must root itself. The weapons of this Church are spiritual and the means for the fulfilment of its mission are found in charity and tolerance. The Church of Christ was never planted by force and Christ will not have an unwilling people serve Him.[1] It is "God's way, to have religion free, and only to flow from an inward principle of faith and love."[2] The Church of Christ is wholly competent to carry out its mission in a society which grants all men complete freedom of belief and worship. It demands for itself and grants to no other group power to rule conscience or to enforce an unwilling and hollow conformity. Would it not be better, Richardson enquired, that "a patent were granted to monopolize all the corne and cloth, and to have it measured out unto us at their price and pleasure . . . as for some men to appoint and measure out unto us what and how much we shall believe and practice in matters of religion."[3] All men must be left free to find the Church of Christ in their own way and in their own time.

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[1] Richardson, *The necessity of toleration*, 17.

[2] Richardson, *An answer to the London ministers letter*, 30–31.

[3] *Ibid.*, 31.

Unrestricted religious liberty, then, would be of inestimable benefit to the Church. Moreover, it would terminate the most fruitful source of civil discord and instability. When freedom of conscience exists for all, men are joined in common loyalty and devotion to the government which protects them in the most priceless of all benefits. The effort to enforce an exclusive and infallible system of faith upon resolved consciences has opened up destructive fissures in the State.[4] But those countries which have embraced religious liberty have been strengthened in the peace and prosperity which are its political derivatives.[5] Persecution hardens men into an inflexible opposition whose fruit is rebellion. The State gains, quite as much as the Church, from the dignity, security, and maturity which religious toleration provides.

Religious liberty, Richardson had indicated, is required by the interests both of religion and of the civil State. It enjoys the additional sanction of natural law. There has been implanted in every man the right to worship "that which he thinketh is God, and as he thinketh he ought to worship; and to force otherwise, will be concluded an oppression of those persons so forced."[1] Religion has been left as free by nature as it was by Christ. He appointed no penalties for those who blasphemed and persecuted Him, nor would He have us do so. We must be completely scrupulous in persuading the resolved conscience which we deem to be in error. If, "in my judgment, your judgment is a lye; will ye compell me to believe a lye? Compell ye a man to be present at a worship which he loathes? Or will ye force my tongue to speake that which my hears [*sic*] cannot affect." The Christian saint will be quite as merciful to the erroneous conscience and quite as solicitous in the protection of its liberty as the law of nature requires.

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[1] Richardson, *The necessity of toleration*, 7.

[2] *Ibid.*, 4.

[3] *Ibid.*, 7.

[4] *Ibid.*, 4–5.

[5] *Ibid.*, 9.

Richardson persistently urged the view, which was to gain such wide acceptance in England during this period, that the revolution had been dedicated to the achievement of the religious liberty which he had so nobly defended. The Baptist leader found in Cromwell's settlement of religion the substantial attainment of the tolerance which he had so fervently demanded in the previous decade. Richardson disliked certain obscure tendencies towards the erection of a National Establishment which were too reminiscent of an exclusive and intolerant Church, but he trusted implicitly the lay genius of the Protector's Government. He could devise in his imagination no system of government which offered greater security to political liberty and the religious conscience.[2] The carping criticism of radical and factious men was belied by the fact that England enjoyed greater freedom than she had ever known before. "Under this government we may serve God according to our understandings and consciences, and be as holy and religious as we can be. We are not forced to be of the opinion and religion that the magistrate is of, right or wrong, and to change when he changeth his, or else be persecuted."[3] Men have been left free to choose between good and evil, and the Kingdom of Christ has expanded by the power of its intrinsic merits. The Cromwellian Government, in Richardson's judgment, had adhered strictly to the principles of religious liberty and had avoided the persecution which for so many centuries harassed the Church. No Government could extend richer blessings to its people.[1]

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[1] Richardson, *The necessity of toleration*, 10.

[2] Richardson, *An apology*, 11.

[3] Richardson, *Plain dealing*, 4.

Moreover, the principles of religious liberty have been engrafted into the fundamental law of the nation. This liberty has been given perpetual efficacy through the *Instrument of Government*, which even Parliament cannot destroy.[2] Cromwell promised to pay the benefits of liberty of conscience in silver and has paid England in gold.[3] The treasure and blood spilled in war will not have been a vain propitiation so long as the benefits of religious toleration are preserved. The solid basis of Cromwell's power rests upon the nation's realization that he has preserved it from the anarchy and violence which factional bitterness and intolerance engender. Religious freedom, Richardson submitted, was safe in his hands. Only fanatical men charge that the saints are persecuted in England. The Fifth Monarchy Men have been restrained and, in some instances, imprisoned because of their incendiary behaviour and their violent attacks upon the State.[4] The saints, too, are under the civil sword and are not immune from the requirements of civil order. They cannot allege conscience in absolution of sedition.[5] All reasonable men agree that the Cromwellian Establishment does not bear upon the conscience of godly men who may oppose it in principle. "Why dost thou find fault," Richardson demanded, "so long as you and others have liberty to preach freely" without the emoluments of the beneficed clergy.[6] The true Church demands nothing more than the liberty which it now enjoys, disdaining the trappings and privileges of the National Churches.

We may believe, in summary, that Richardson exercised a considerable influence upon the thought of his period. He wrote simply, calmly, and thoughtfully, addressing himself to the most troubled problems of his day. He exhibited a fine objectivity and a carefully reasoned defence of a broadly conceived liberty of conscience. He supported his theory of toleration with all the arguments which religion and politics could provide. Richardson found in the Cromwellian settlement of religion a satisfactory solution for the requirements of a tender conscience. He defended it soberly and effectively against the accusations of men whom any ordered society would regard as seditious. The pious conscience, he indicated, will be content with peace and liberty, while those factious men who clothe their arrogance and ambition in the garb of religion should be repressed in the interests of common good. In these convictions Richardson expressed the temper of a steadily enlarging body of English opinion.

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[1] Richardson, *Plain dealing*, 6.

[2] Richardson, *An apology*, 13.

[3] Richardson, *Plain dealing*, 6.

[4] *Ibid.*, 13.

[5] Richardson, *An apology*, 5.

[6] *Ibid.*, 8; *Plain dealing*, 16.

7. *Liberty of conscience asserted*, 1649

The essentially lay temper which is to be seen in Richardson's thought is likewise to be observed in a number of the Baptist tracts of this period. The Baptists, it may be said, displayed a keener appreciation of the principles of religious toleration and a more pragmatic devotion to religious freedom than did any other sect of the revolutionary era. They tended to assess all religious and political development in strict reference to its effect upon tolerance and were hence unusually sensitive to the meaning of religious freedom and to limitations which threatened its constitution. These characteristics are particularly evident in a very short but important anonymous pamphlet published in early 1649. Internal evidence and stylistic similarity would suggest that it may have been from the pen of Richardson or from some Baptist associated with him. The *Liberty of Conscience Asserted* is of peculiar interest because of its careful and courageous treatment of the question of error and its frank consideration of the problem of Roman Catholic dissent.

The treatment of these topics, always a test of any thinker's tolerance, is prefaced by a brief comment on the iniquity of coercive systems of religion. The Christian faith is founded upon love and charity. It is difficult to comprehend the angry zeal of those who would persecute dissent with "fire and sword" in the name of Christ. The persecuting philosophy bears no relation to the temper of the early Christians who preferred to lay down their own lives rather than inflict penalties upon those who differed from them in questions of faith.[1] All sects that have endeavoured to rule with the sword of persecution have in due time perished by it. The writer fervently hoped that England had come to apprehend the spiritual nature of faith and that those responsible for the welfare and government of the country would protect the consciences of all men by maintaining religious liberty with the sanctions of law.[2] For all civilized and Christian men must regard persecution as a heinous crime against God, nature, and reason.

The author subjected the difficult problem of serious error in faith to careful scrutiny. It would appear evident, he suggested, that all religious belief must be rooted in the judgment and conscience of man. Any man, therefore, who conforms in religion contrary to the dictates of his own reason commits a damnable sin. Similarly, those who employ force to secure an unconvinced acquiescence to authority err and sin quite as damnably. "Hence it is, that a man is bound even by the law of God, to remain in that error, which in his conscience he believes, upon mature deliberation, to be the truth, till his judgment be satisfied to the contrary."[3] It follows that persecution can work no effect but evil and that a Church founded upon coercion is false and sinful. The requirements of our faith demand that we treat those whom we believe to be lost in error with all gentleness and tolerance. When we reflect that a man is powerless to convert himself, the awful impropriety of coercion becomes apparent. The work of conversion, and of damnation, must be left to the inscrutable wisdom of God. Christian reflection will inform us that every species of coercion in religion "is a sin against the laws of God, of nature, and of reason. That it is a spirituall murder, an assacination of the soul, by so much more flagitious than the murthering of the flesh, as the soul is more excellent than the body; in fine it is to rage against God himself, the most horrid of sins."[4]

Religious liberty, the Baptist writer maintained, was necessary for the attainment of the true mission of the Church. Religious life in the finest meaning of the term can exist in no other *milieu*. Religious liberty must be construed and constituted broadly and its effect must be universal and positive. All too often men have prated of religious freedom while enthroning their own dicta in rigid formulae. Religious liberty must not be destroyed by the reservations with which the orthodox strive to circumscribe it.

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[1] *Liberty of conscience asserted: or, persecution for religion condemned; by the laws of God, nature, reason, etc.* (L., 1649), 1.

[2] *Ibid.*, 4.

[3] *Ibid.*, 2.

[4] *Ibid.*, 3.

Liberty of Conscience Asserted was written shortly after the parliamentary enactment of the Blasphemy Ordinance had focused public attention upon the limits with which the orthodox proposed to restrict freedom of worship. The Baptist apologist held that any limitation upon liberty of conscience destroys its entire validity. Hence the question of the Catholics, who were usually condemned as idolaters, must be carefully and honestly considered. England should not sacrifice the vast benefits of religious toleration simply because the misguided Catholics gain some liberty therefrom. Religious liberty must be proclaimed without exception lest in due time the exceptions are interpreted and expanded into the rule. "For it is impossible to couch any penall statute, touching matters of faith, and Gods worship, in such terms, as it may not easily be made appliable to any godly people whatsoever, when the civill magistrate shall become disaffected towards them."[1] "Papist" has become a general term of reproach and contempt with which we indiscriminately assail our enemies. Human pride and malice twist and pervert terms to serve the aims of intolerance.

Furthermore, the author doubted whether religious Catholics were really guilty of the awful sin of idolatry. But even granted that they stand convicted of this most serious of all religious offences, we gain therefrom no right to persecute them. The values and sanctions of religious liberty are universal and compel the Christian to tolerate all error. No Christian would dare persecute even flagrant and certain idolatry without a "speciall and particular warrant from God" as the exception to the toleration which He evidently requires.[2] The Church possesses adequate spiritual protection against the ravages of heresy. We cannot be more sensitive towards error than is God, who has reserved its judgment to Himself.

[1] *Liberty of conscience asserted*, 4.

[2] *Ibid.*, 5.

Thus no valid religious argument can be advanced for excepting even the most grievous error from the benefits of religious liberty. Nor can the great gains of religious toleration be sacrificed on the plea that the Roman Catholics as heretics and seditious men must be restrained. The Catholics may and should be punished for seditious actions, but this is quite as true of the godly as of the ungodly. The offence in this instance is civil and the punishment is civil. No confusion may exist between the responsibilities of a man in his capacity as a citizen of a state and the absolute liberty which he enjoys as a citizen of the Kingdom of Christ. Religious freedom can work no conceivable injury to the security of the civil State. It has not been found, the writer concluded, that the presence of Jews is inconsistent with the health of a Christian State, or that of Christians with a Turkish State.[1] The two spheres will flourish best when they exist in a state of complete dissociation.

8. THOMAS COLLIER

Our survey of the thought of the leading Baptist writers of the revolutionary era may well be concluded by a criticism of the works of Thomas Collier, a prolific pamphleteer and the founder of several Baptist churches. The date of Collier's birth is unknown and his early history remains obscure. Edwards, who is not to be trusted fully, said that he was originally an ignorant carter or husbandman.[2] He was apparently a man of some property since he became involved with the ecclesiastical authorities in 1634 upon his refusal to pay tithes upon certain lands which he held in Surrey. Collier probably embraced Baptist beliefs prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, and was by 1643 a well-known lay preacher. He preached for some years in Guernsey, but was expelled with several of his followers in 1646. Shortly afterwards Collier appeared in London, where he became an effective lay evangelist. In 1647 he preached during the important debates of the Army Council at Putney. During the next decade Collier visited every part of England as an itinerant minister and founder of churches. His efforts met with singular success in the West of England, where he

[1] *Liberty of conscience asserted*, 5–6.

[2] Edwards, *Gangraena*, iii, 41.

presided at Wells over a conference of sixteen western churches which endorsed the London Confession of 1644.[1] Collier developed rather mild millenarian views during this period and was an outspoken supporter of the execution of the king.[2] He was deprived of the living at Nether Whitacre (Worcestershire) following the Restoration,[3] but continued with his preaching and writing. He was licensed to preach at North Bradley (near Trowbridge) in 1672, and was probably living as late as 1691, when his last book appeared.

Collier shared the normal Baptist view that the magistrate enjoys no coercive power in the Church. Christ has carefully reserved all authority in matters of conscience to His own jurisdiction.[4] The Church and all who comprise it have in the Bible a perfect rule of faith and discipline which precludes the intervention of any man in its affairs. It is impious to hold that God has surrendered human beings to the fallible determinations of other men, while reserving judgment upon them according to His Word. Sovereignty must be vested somewhere in religious life as well as in the civil society. Clearly, the rule of our faith is found in the Bible just as the rule of our conduct is ordained by civil laws.

Those who would bestow religious authority upon the magistrate always presume a civil authority friendly to their particular interests. They confine this authority explicitly to the godly magistrate but fail to inform us how the righteous ruler is to be known and secured. For all men consider themselves godly. This delusion has been a pregnant source of misery and persecution. "The papist supposes all truth to be there, and persecutes the Protestants under the notion of hereticks. The Protestant supposes the papist to be out, and himself to be in the right, and persecutes the papist; and thus this very principle throws the world into confusion. Every one that can get into power is ready to make, or . . . to think himself an absolute God" in matters of faith.[5] Confusion, bloodshed, and the persecution of the Church of God ensue. The Church cannot flourish in these circumstances, which can have none but a disastrous consequence. The rule of the Church and of Christian conscience must be restored unreservedly to Christ, who has never relaxed it. The intrusion of a repressive power in matters of faith "is one of the first and greatest degrees of anti-christian tyranny"[1] and a perversion of the Christian doctrine of love. The utmost spiritual power is invested in the Church, but it does not extend to bodily coercion. Those who arrogate this authority to themselves destroy Christ and His Gospel.[2]

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[1] *Baptist Historical Society, Transacts.*, I, 121.

[2] Whitley, *British Baptists*, 79.

[3] Turner, *Original Records*, 1122.

[4] Collier, Thomas, *The decision and clearing of the great point now in controversie, about the interest of Christ and the civill magistrate, in the rule of government in this world, etc.* (L., 1659), 3.

[5] *Ibid.*, 5.

Collier renounced without reservation all coercion in matters of faith. The Christian religion, he maintained, cannot fulfil its true mission until it has emancipated itself from the stifling tradition of persecution. Religious tyranny is "a proud, selfish principle" rooted in the basest instincts of human nature.[3] Men denounce it while they are under its yoke, but when they have gained the mastery they seek to exercise it. As sects attain the dignity and power of Churches they endeavour to entrench themselves by sanctions of coercion. Yet in so doing they invade Christ's prerogatives and contract for themselves the guilt of the souls which the ravages of persecution destroy. An inflexible and imperious orthodoxy, Collier wrote (with the Assembly in mind), enjoys no validity over the godly man who is led by God, and exercises no authority over the heretical man who is not under God's ordinances.[4] Rigid dogmatic systems and proud Churches confer no spiritual benefits, but are the source of infinite damage to the fair structure of Christ's Church. By the inherent evil of their constitution such systems are irreligious and hence wreak destruction upon countless souls by deterring them "from closing with the truth, and compelling them to close with error."[5] The iniquity of this philosophy is absolute; it is quite as great when it is maintained by Protestants as when it is practised by Catholics. Christ has not delivered the world from the bondage of the law to lay upon it a new and heavier cross.

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[1] Collier, Thomas, *Certaine queries: or, points now in controversy examined, etc.* (L., 1645), 24.

[2] Collier, *The decision and clearing of the great point*, 7–8.

[3] *Ibid.*, 9.

[4] Collier, *Certaine queries*, 27.

[5] Collier, *The decision and clearing of the great point*, 9.

Indeed, Collier would argue that religious persecution practised by Protestants was even more iniquitous than the intolerance of the Catholics. For Romanism is based upon an infallible and prescriptive philosophy which denies to the individual the right of enquiry and the prerogative of freedom of belief. Persecution, in fine, is an integral part of its doctrine. But Protestantism denies the very origin and essence of its own being when it embraces persecution. The Reformation is founded upon the conviction that all men should be permitted freely to search the Bible and to discover the mind of God for themselves. These principles cannot be vitiated without destroying Protestantism. In effect, orthodoxy invites men to see with their own eyes, yet commands them to believe as authority prescribes.[1]

It is evident, Collier held, that intolerance enjoys no validity either in Protestantism or in Christianity. Christ compelled no man. "Christ overpowers the soule by his spirit, and then men are willing, and till then, man is not to meddle with them in spirituall things: We never find in Scriptures, that God gives power to any man to erect or set up a church government, or to compell any to the government of Christ by any humane power."[2] Christ requires conditions of absolute liberty for the determination of His truth and the founding of His Church. We need not be disturbed by the multiplicity of beliefs and opinions which liberty of worship will apparently engender. In this environment alone can truth prevail against error and will the Church be able to root itself in the fertile soil of conviction and conscience. Religious liberty is not only essential for the redemption of the lost; it is necessary for the very existence of the Church.

Collier would have extended complete liberty of conscience and worship to all men of all creeds, save for rather curious exceptions concerning blasphemy and Catholicism. The magistrate should endow all men who profess Christ with freedom in their subjective responsibility for finding and embracing religious truth. The Baptist writer appears inclined, however, to treat blasphemy, it being rightly understood, as a moral offence which the State should punish as such.[1] Conscience, it is clear, must not be disturbed even when it errs in matters of "the highest concernment."[2] Blasphemy, on the other hand, offends the majesty and person of God and should be punished by penalties short of death. Similarly, the Roman Catholics should be restrained because they have proved enemies of the civil State and hence have brought themselves under the proper jurisdiction of the civil magistrate.[3] But no other religious group may be limited in spiritual liberty, since thereby conscience would clearly be violated. This liberty, Collier argued, should apply without reservation even to the Jews. They were a rebellious people but they have long since made expiation for their offence. In any event, authority has not been granted to Christians to exercise the wrath of God. England is heaping additional afflictions upon them and is arrogantly judging and condemning them by its refusal to extend them liberty.[4] The Jews can do no injury to true faith, and those who fear their missionary activities confess the weakness of their own knowledge of truth. The weapons of religion are spiritual and "he is but a cowardly souldier that instead of fighting with an enemy, will get a power to bind his hands first . . . ."[5] Surely Christendom rests confident in its own matchless truth despite the errors which surround it.

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[1] Collier, *The decision and clearing of the great point*, 11–12.

[2] Collier, *Certaine queries*, 24–25.

Collier may be regarded as a typical Baptist minister of the period. His thought, while lacking the rich mysticism of a Williams or the sturdy practicality of a Richardson, made a significant contribution to the development of religious toleration. Still another effective voice was added to the rising chorus which denounced all religious coercion. Collier exploited with astuteness the individualism and spiritual independence inherent in Protestant philosophy to argue the case of religious freedom. He stoutly maintained that religious persecution enjoyed no virtue whether it undergirded the structure of the true or the false Church. It was, in his view, an unchristian accretion upon the body of Christianity which must be cut away if the Church were to regain vitality and a sense of its mission. Collier recommended unrestricted religious liberty to men of all faiths with the unfortunate exceptions which demonstrate at once the piety and the morbid preoccupations of the zealous in his age.

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[1] Collier, *The decision and clearing of the great point*, 15.

[2] *Ibid.*, 16.

[3] Collier, *Certaine queries*, 26.

[4] [Collier, Thomas], *A brief answer to some of the objections and demurs made against the coming in and inhabiting of the Jews in this commonwealth, etc.* (L., 1656), 5.

[5] *Ibid.*, 10.

9. Minor baptist theorists

A considerable Baptist literature exists which throws revealing light upon the reaction of obscure and inarticulate men to the problems which war and unstinted religious controversy had provoked in England. Much of this literature is anonymous and many of the writers who did sign their pamphlets cannot be rescued from the obscurity in which they lived and died. One of the most interesting aspects of the period under survey was the wresting of religious discussion from skilled clerical hands by men and women who had hitherto been wholly inarticulate. A lay character intruded itself into religious thought; literary style was materially and permanently affected; and a powerful liberal influence was brought to bear on ecclesiastical discussion by the rude intervention of obscure men into areas hitherto the sacrosanct preserves of the divines. It may be said categorically that as the historian descends into the thought of the obscure writers of any sectarian group in this period, he observes an enlarged tolerance, an almost fanatical hatred of persecution, and gains a revealing insight into the amazing erosion which had occurred in the theory of enforced uniformity.

a. On the role of the magistrate in the Church

The Baptist theorists were careful to emphasize their loyalty to the magistracy in all civil concerns. The magistrate is set by God over his people and all due obedience should be rendered to him.[1] At the same time, the dissociation between the civil and the religious spheres is complete. The civil ruler

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[1] *A confession of faith of seven congregations or churches of Christ in London, which are commonly . . . called Anabaptists, etc.* (L., 1644, *1646*), *Art.* 48.

"can truly take cognizance of nothing . . . but what is proper and within his civil sphear," since Christ has excluded him explicitly from any power in His spiritual kingdom.[1] The magistrate's supreme duty is to protect his people in absolute liberty of conscience, "without which all other libertie will not be worth the naming, much less enjoying," and to preserve all men in the spiritual freedom necessary for salvation.[2] Religion is attained by no other means than the persuasion of reason and conscience. Consequently, any interference by the civil ruler in religious affairs should be resisted, passively but resolutely.

This conviction was elevated to almost creedal sanctity by the Baptists in the revolutionary period. They were prepared to lend their loyalty to any ruler who would ensure the preservation of the fundamental prerogative of liberty of conscience. When, therefore, there appeared reason to fear that Cromwell would permit the erection of a loosely federated ecclesiastical system, certain Baptists in the army united to warn him of the fatal consequences of such a step. The Civil Wars, they urged, had been fought to secure the benefits of liberty of conscience and that great gain must not be sacrificed. Those who elevated Cromwell to power are dedicated to this principle, and the Baptists solemnly reminded him that a hundred "of the old Anabaptists, such as march'd under your command, in 48, 49, and 50," were "as good as two hundred of your new courtiers, if you were in such a condition as you were at Dunbar."[3] No ruler can embrace the arms of coercion or lend his support to the establishment of a rigid and repressive Church without sacrificing the loyalty of godly men.

b. On the Church

Religious coercion and the intervention of the magistrate in spiritual affairs presume a conception of the Church which enjoys no validity whatever in Christ's teachings. For, a typical Baptist confession stated in explicit language, "Jesus Christ hath here on earth a spiritual kingdom, which is his church, whom he hath purchased and redeemed to himself as a peculiar inheritance." This Church is founded by persuasion and by the compulsion of Christ's Word, not by the agencies of temporal force. It is a voluntary company of saints, separated from the world by the fact of regeneration and by the symbol of baptism, which practises in mutual agreement the ordinances of its Divine Master.[1] This Church is not of this world. It cannot be created by edict, nor can men be won to it by force, for it rigidly excludes those who have not experienced the miracle of redemption.

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[1] W., R., *The fourth paper, presented by Major Butler, to the honourable committee of Parliament, for the propagating the Gospel of Christ Jesus, etc.* (L., 1652), 14–15.

[2] *A confession of faith, Art.* 48.

[3] [Sturgion, John], *A short discovery of his highness the Lord Protector's intentions touching the Anabaptists in the army, etc.* (L., 1655), 4.

The Baptists adhered consistently to this intensely spiritual conception of the Church. Their definition acquires great significance for the development of religious toleration when we reflect that it precluded all coercion and repression as the instrument of faith and of organized religion. Toleration follows as a necessary derivative of this definition of the Church. This fact is admirably demonstrated by the almost instinctive horror with which Baptist thinkers of the period viewed a National Church including both saints and sinners and founded upon the rotten pillars of enforced uniformity.

No true reformation can be effected in England until the last vestige of the theory of enforced uniformity is swept out of religious thinking. Both tradition and the habit of organization suggest the formation of a national, coercive Church which serves the ends of pride and intolerance. The spiritual reformation has long stuck upon this rock of infallible presumption. Religious liberty will gain nothing if Presbyterian orthodoxy is enshrined in the stead of prelacy, if the Directory takes the place of the Prayer Book.[2] "Our fathers before us in England, though famous for civil laws, and wars, and victories, yet have they but trod the round, and walked in a circle; plant and pluck up, plant and pluck up" in their efforts to find the spiritual Kingdom of God.[1] The witness of past ages attests the barbarity and inhumanity of an attempt to prescribe with rigid dicta to the religious conscience. Christ will never tolerate a Church which rests upon force and the power of the magistrate,

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[1] *A confession of faith, Art.* 33.

[2] Kiffin, William, *A briefe remonstrance of the reasons and grounds of those people commonly called Anabaptists, for their seperation, &c. Or certaine queries concerning their faith and practice, propounded by Mr. Robert Poole; answered and resolved* (L., 1645), 7. Though his contribution to theory was slight, William Kiffin (1616–1701) was one of the ablest of the Baptist leaders of his generation. His career illustrates at once the rising social and economic strength of the communion and its amazing gains in public repute during the period under survey. As a boy Kiffin was apprenticed

to the great radical, John Lilburne, but left his employment in 1631 to take service with a glover. He became in 1632 a follower of John Goodwin, joining the Congregational Church at Southwark six years later. Shortly afterwards he became a member of Spilsbury's Particular Baptist Church in London (Brown, *Baptists and Fifth Monarchy Men*, 4). Kiffin was imprisoned for a short time in 1641 under charges of attending a conventicle. At about this time he began an importing and contracting business which laid the foundations of one of the great mercantile fortunes of the Restoration period. He was known as one of the wealthiest of the London merchants and as a man of considerable influence in public affairs (Carlile, J. C., *The Story of the English Baptists, etc.* (L., 1905), 90–91). Despite his business activity and financial success, Kiffin preached constantly during the revolutionary period, seeking to effect some cohesion in his singularly individualistic communion. He was conservative in his political views, opposing the execution of the king, and became in the next decade a stalwart champion of the Cromwellian Government against the incendiary attacks of the millenarians. He frequently appeared before Parliament in the interests of his sect (*Perfect Diurnall*, January 17, 1649), eliciting from the Speaker in 1649 the statement "that for yourselves and other Christians walking answerable to such professions, as in this petition you make, they [the Commons] do assure you of liberty and protection, so far as God shall enable them, in all things consistent with godlyness, honesty, and civill peace." (*Perfect Diurnall*, April 2, 1649.) He was cited to appear before the Lord Mayor in 1655 on charges of illegal preaching and inveighing against infant baptism, but the case was apparently not pressed. (Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, I, 261.) The incident did not injure his reputation, however, since he was returned to Parliament as a member from Middlesex in the following year with the support of the urban electorate, the county people in the constituency opposing him under the militant slogan, "noe Anabaptists." (*Thurloe Papers*, V, 349, 286.)

Kiffin continued his lay preaching after the Restoration, enjoying the protection of both Clarendon and the king. When in 1664 several Baptists were sentenced to death at Ailsbury, Kiffin was successful in obtaining a pardon from the chancellor. (Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, II, 184–185.) A very rich man, Kiffin responded to the demand of the king for a loan of £40,000 with the happy and frugal compromise of £10,000. (Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, III, 4.) As an aged Baptist veteran Kiffin was one of a number of the sect appointed by James II to the local government on the occasion of the revocation of the charter of the City. Kiffin died at the age of eighty-five, having preached to his congregation until shortly before his death. A careful study of this most interesting career would constitute a valuable contribution to our knowledge of nonconformity and economic progress during the Restoration period.

[1] W., R., *The fourth paper*, 15.

however fair its lineaments may be.[1] The ideal of a National Church must be renounced as a danger to the security of the Commonwealth and as fatal to that freedom of conscience which is the divine gift to all men.[2] The civil authority should consequently "forbear forever to impose any national parochial ministry" or to "inforce any form of worship" which seeks to compel men to one religious persuasion.[3] These are not the timbers from which Christ's spiritual Church is fabricated.

c. On coercion of conscience

The minor Baptist theorists testified consistently and fervently against the grave injury which coercion of conscience wrought in the true Church. The evil days of the Church in England date from the passage of the statute for the burning of heretics.[4] In its struggle to achieve a truly spiritual reformation the nation has never been able to eradicate the stain which has been left upon the Church. The Revolution has been waged to achieve this purpose, and Englishmen will not again permit men to be slain in the name of religion.[5] No Parliament can ever again enact penal laws or found a coercive ecclesiastical system, "being sensible what a burden such penall lawes have been to tender consciences, and what an hindrance they are for propagating truth."[6] No servant of Jesus Christ "hath any liberty, much less authority, from his Lord, to smite his fellow servant, nor yet with outward force, or arme of flesh, to constrain, or restrain his conscience, no nor yet his outward man for conscience sake, or worship of his God, where injury is not offered to the person, name or estate of others."[1] All men are responsible to God alone for their salvation, and human power may not rightly intervene in a relationship wherein it enjoys no jurisdiction. Men must be left free to choose between truth and error, and the assessment of their decision must remain in divine hands.

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[1] W., R., *The fourth paper*, 17.

[2] *A further testimony to truth . . . by some baptized congregations . . . in the counties of Leicester, Nottingham, Rutland, Lincoln, Stafford, Darby, and Shropshire* (L., 1659) (s.sh.).

[3] *A testimony to truth, agreeing with essay for settlement upon a sure foundation* (L., 1659) (s.sh.).

[4] Cornwell, Francis, *The vindication of the royall commission of King Jesus, etc.* (L., 1644), *Pref.* Francis Cornwell was educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He entered holy orders and for some time was a minister at Orpington, Kent. Embracing Nonconformist views, Cornwell was thrown into prison by Laud, where he probably adopted Baptist tenets. In 1643, or shortly thereafter, he gathered his own congregation at Marden (Kent), where he preached quietly until his death. Cornwell converted Blackwood to the Baptist faith. (Neal, *History of the Puritans*, III, 409–410.) He was succeeded in his church by a son of the same name, with whom he has frequently been confused. Ivimey has called him "a very zealous opposer of persecution for conscience sake and of all imposed uniformity." (Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, II, 228.)

[5] Cornwell, Francis, *A description of the spiritual temple: or the spouse prepared for the Lambe, the Lord Jesus* (L., 1646), 72.

[6] *Ibid.*, 76.

The coercion of conscience destroys the spiritual vitality of the Church and perverts the very meaning of Christ's message. Whoever erects a repressive system lays "a foundation of a new rent in the ages and generations to come,"[2] and rears a cross upon which may be stretched his own posterity. He perpetuates a system which has been most largely responsible for the wars and misery which for so long have engulfed mankind. The children of God must carefully avoid the awful sin of persecution.[3] The godly will rest firm in the conviction that it is "sinful for us to maintaine our religion by a carnal sword, or to assert any spirituall cause or thing thereby."[1] They will realize that no warrant from Christ or from His apostles can be adduced for the coercion of the human conscience.[2] Man is responsible only to God in a worship which is at once purely spiritual and personal.[3] In that worship force has no place,[4] and can accomplish nothing but its destruction. The reformation which Christ desires will "give to all . . . faithfull Daniels, libertie of conscience, to worship the Lord in spirit and truth."[5] In the religious liberty which all men will gain from that reformation, truth, charity, and righteousness will at long last triumph.

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[1] Clark, John, *Ill newes from New England. Or a narative of New-Englands persecution, etc.* (L., 1652), 10. John Clark (1609–1676) was a native of Suffolk. In 1637 he emigrated to New England, where in Boston he championed the case of the proscribed Antinomians. The orthodox environment of Boston was inhospitable to him and, with the consent of Roger Williams, he and several other dissenters settled in Rhode Island in 1638. He became a Baptist about 1644, and remained on intimate terms with the founder of the colony. Clark returned to England in 1651 on a colonial commission, remaining until the Restoration. In 1661 he secured a royal charter for Rhode Island which recognized the principle of liberty of conscience in the colony.

[2] Cornwell, *A description of the spiritual temple*, 77.

[3] Danvers, Henry, *Certain quaeries concerning liberty of conscience, etc.* (L., 1649), 3–4. Danvers (or D'Anvers) was a member of a wealthy Staffordshire family. He was a colonel in the parliamentary army (Brown, *Baptists and Fifth Monarchy Men*, 11) and was subsequently the governor of Stafford and a justice in that county (Neal, *History of the Puritans*, III, 415). Shortly after the dissolution of the Barebones Parliament, of which he was a member, Danvers adopted millenarian doctrines. He was imprisoned in 1657 on suspicion of complicity in Harrison's Plot on the Protector's life. Following the Restoration he became a preaching elder in the Baptist church at Aldgate. He soon incurred the suspicions of the Government because of Fifth Monarchy activities and was imprisoned for some years. His release was secured in 1675 by his wife, who enjoyed the favour of "great friends at court." (Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*, III, 97.) An inveterate plotter, Danvers was implicated in Monmouth's Rebellion and fled abroad, where he died shortly afterwards

d. On toleration

We have observed that Congregationalism became increasingly conservative as its own sectarian position was made secure and as its thinkers became more fully conscious of the spiritual anarchy which must inevitably accompany liberty of worship. This tendency is not apparent in Baptist thought during the revolutionary era. The political thought of the communion rapidly grew more conservative, but the writers of the sect remained consistently devoted to the principle of religious toleration. The writers of this party admitted the shattering effect which religious liberty must inevitably have upon Protestant catholicity, but it was precisely this effect which these thinkers held to be essential for the emancipation of the regenerated Church from the worldly and coercive associations which had made of national establishments a dead and formal tomb of Christianity. The Baptists, almost alone amongst the major Protestant groups, were completely sectarian in their philosophy.

The godly, their writers maintained, require complete liberty for the fullest expression of the faith which activates their lives. This liberty they desire for all men to the end that true piety and the free play of God's truth may once more be emancipated "to the good of all."[1] The principle of toleration should be deeply embedded as a fundamental of the national polity.[2] Religious liberty should be secured in the interests of all sects, whether Anglicans, Independents, Presbyterians, or Baptists, that do "not dispute one another's *principia*, but labour to agree in union."[3] When all communions have liberty, the issue of truth and error will be resolved by the spiritual criteria which enforce upon them the objective test of God's Word. No religious communion which rests confident in its faith will fear to subject that faith to the tests of reason, disputation, and persuasion. In that climate of opinion which toleration engenders the world may at last find the catholicity towards which it has struggled through so many vicissitudes.

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[1] *A declaration of some of those people in or near London, called Anabaptists, etc.* ([L.?], 1660) (s.sh.).

[2] Clark, *Ill newes from New England*, 65.

[3] *Ibid.*, 67.

[4] *Ibid.*, 70–71.

[5] Cornwell, *A description of the spiritual temple*, 78.

The Baptist writers urged consistently that the toleration which they required should be complete. They disowned any factional desire to hedge it with reservations calculated to redound to the benefit of their own sectarian persuasion. All men who do not break the peace of the civil society should "not suffer in their names, bodies, or estates, from the hands of the civil magistrate, or any other men whatsoever, merely for what they conscientiously do, in things pertaining to the worship of God."[4] The land should be blessed with the precious privilege of worshipping God in every way that a variety of convictions may suggest. The "most mistaken Christian, being sober and peaceful," should receive protection and liberty.[5]

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[1] *A declaration by congregationall societies in, and about the city of London; as well as those commonly called Anabaptists, as others. In way of vindication of themselves, etc.* (L., 1647), in Underhill, E. B., *Confessions of Faith and Other Public Documents Illustrative of the History of the Baptist Churches of England in the 17th Century* (L., 1854), 275.

[2] *A true copy of a petition . . . intended to have been delivered to the late Parliament* (L., 1658), 4–6; *A declaration of some of those people . . . called Anabapists*, s.sh.

[3] *Letter to States General*, in Ivimey, *History of the English Baptists*, I, 230.

[4] *A declaration by congregationall societies*, in Underhill, *Confessions of Faith*, 275; *Conscience caution'd, and so set at libertie, also a further answer to the city remonstrance* (L., 1646), 1–2.

[5] *The petition of divers gathered churches, and others wel affected, in and about the city of London, for declaring the ordinance of the Lords and Commons, for punishing blasphemies and heresies, null and void, etc.* (L., 1651, *1655*), 3–4; *A brief confession or declaration of faith: set forth by many of us, who are (falsely) called Ana-baptists, to inform all men . . . of our innocent belief and practise, etc.* (L., 1660), in Underhill, *Confessions of Faith*, *Art.* 24.

The golden rule of the gospel should prevail and the assessment and punishment of what we conceive to be error should be left to the judgment of God.[1] The preoccupations which Christians have displayed with the errors of other men will under these circumstances give way to the subjective interest of saintly men in the perfection of their own measure of faith. The true Church of the regenerate will seek to impose its beliefs upon no one, but will strive to maintain the tolerance which protects all men.[2] "For why should we not give unto another," a Baptist petition enquired, "that we would (in this case) injoy our selves, or who is he that will judge another mans conscience . . . if any corrupt, or unsound doctrine, come into the church, there is the law of Christ to deale with them by."[3] Men of true faith have nothing to fear from the infection of error. They are moved instead to pray that the Government which the nation has reared as a bulwark against tyranny may strike off the yokes "which our fathers have laid upon the neck of this nation, and at last to proclaim a true and absolute soul freedom to all the people of the land impartially."[4] In this circumstance alone can the charity and humility which Christ has commanded in His Church prevail. In this liberty alone will truth discover those resources with which error may be vanquished.

Religious toleration will orient the Church in its relation to the problem of error. Error will enjoy absolute freedom without the Church, while within its confines stringent spiritual penalties will preserve its pristine purity. The Church will vindicate itself by complete absorption in its spiritual function and mission. "This spirituall administration so far as it concerns the outward man, is managed not by a sword of steel (which cannot come neer or touch the spirit or mind of man) but by the sword that proceeds out of the mouth of his servants, the word of truth."[1] The "inferior weapons" of the carnal world have for too long done service in the conquest of error.[2] Men must be permitted freely to hold and expound their heresies until they have been won by the manifest truth of the gospel. So long as God remains unprovoked by errors, the fallible judgment of man must bear with them.[3] Men are convinced and won by persuasion; beasts are led by coercive yokes.[4] The true Church will rest content in any society, amongst all communions, so long as it enjoys the prerogatives of toleration. It seeks supremacy over no one, and will discipline itself by no severer penalty than excommunication.[5] It will seek to serve the ends of peace and it will endeavour to assist all men who dwell on earth to find truth and salvation in the way which they deem to lead to God.

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[1] *A brief confession or declaration of faith, lately presented to King Charles the Second; set forth by many of us who are falsely called Anabaptists, etc.* (L., [1660?]), 19.

[2] *A declaration of a small society of baptized believers, undergoing the name of free-willers, etc.* (L., 1660).

[3] *A declaration of several baptized believers, walking in all the foundation principles of the doctrine of Christ* (L., 1659).

[4] W., R., *The fourth paper*, 17.

The minor Baptist theorists testified that they had found in the Cromwellian settlement of religion that tolerance which they held necessary to a rich and perfect spiritual life. Under the Protector they have been permitted to "worship the Lord in that way our consciences are convinced of is most agreeable to the will of God, a mercy not usually enjoyed by the saints in any age before, and, we have cause to fear, not prized by saints."[6] The Baptists liked to imagine this liberty as the entering wedge of a larger freedom which would split asunder the flinty cliffs of persecution and intolerance throughout the world. They declared their conviction that the "measure of liberty . . . which hath of late years been allowed the people of God" in England had contributed at least "a little" to that end.[7]

When these sentiments are read against the background of English thought two generations earlier it becomes evident that amazing gains had been made towards the acceptance by gentle and peaceable men of a positive doctrine of toleration.

[1] Clark, *Ill newes from New England, Epist. Dedic.*

[2] *A declaration by congregationall societies*, in Underhill, *Confessions of Faith*, 276.

[3] *Conscience caution'd*, 5.

[4] *Ibid.*, 10.

[5] *A declaration of a small society of baptized believers.*

[6] *Letter from Mr. Kiffen and others, to the people of Ireland* (November, 1653), in Underhill, *Confessions of Faith*, 325.

[7] [Fisher, Samuel, *et al.*], *The humble representation and vindication of . . . the baptized churches in this nation, etc.* (L., 1655), 4.

The England of the revolutionary era had progressed so far in the way of toleration that it was prepared to accept it as a necessary compromise for the dangerous situation in which warring and mutually exclusive bigotries had placed the nation; the Baptists not only accepted toleration as a *politique* necessity but embraced it as a principle of religious right. The Baptist theorists had vindicated religious liberty for all men as an abstract prerogative. It now remains to apply to their liberalism the harshest of tests: the attitude which they took concerning the treatment which Christians should accord to men and to beliefs which the Baptists, with all of Protestant England, believed dangerously heretical or impious.

e. On the treatment of blasphemy, error, and irreligion

The minor Baptist thinkers made it clear that they would extend religious liberty even to those sects and eccentric individuals that outraged by doctrines of grave impiety the Christian conscience of the seventeeth century. Even blasphemy must be spared from molestation since its punishment presumes an infallibility of judgment which has not been bestowed upon any man.[1] The Christian Church must recall that the orthodox of another age "made fair pretences in taking away the prophets of old, as the seditious and disturbers; our Saviour himself as a blasphemer; his disciples and followers as movers of sedition, stirrers up of the people, and hereticks."[2] In the same way, the most grievous heresy must be left unmolested. God has permitted errors to exist and has reserved judgment over them to Himself.[3] The Church and State have been given no authority whatsoever over the erroneous conscience.[4] The persecution of heresy has been the most awful sin of the Church; it has laid waste the godly and has been employed by unscrupulous men as an instrument for the aggrandizement of their own power.[5] The true Church will use all the means within its disposal to cleanse itself of heresy and to maintain spotlessly its truth—but it will leave unmolested the error and heresy of all those who are without its communion.

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[1] Danvers, *Certain quaeries*, 1, 4; W., R., *The fourth paper*, 6.

[2] Danvers, *Certain quaeries*, 4.

[3] W., R., *The fourth paper*, 2–6.

[4] Danvers, *Certain quaeries*, 2.

[5] T., S., *Moderation; or arguments and motives tending thereunto, humbly tendred to . . . Parliament, etc.* (L., 1660), 2, 12–13.

Similarly, the Baptists taught that unchristian groups should be granted liberty of belief and worship so long as they were not guilty of civil disturbances. The Jews, "whose conversion we look for," should be permitted to dwell freely in the tolerant state.[1] The Quakers and other strange enthusiasts should enjoy the full franchise of religious liberty until they transgress the bounds of civil peace. Even the Socinians, who were hated and feared by all Christian sects of the period, should, in the view of the Baptist thinkers, be granted unrestricted freedom of worship. No exceptions whatsoever can be made in religious liberty without securing the destruction of the foundations upon which it rests. If the civil governor is able to imprison a Socinian for religious cause, he is by the same token able to punish any man who dissents from the accepted religious mores of the State.[2] The molestation of any religious conscience, however erroneous, "destroies the government, and frustrates us of the fruit of that liberty, whose seed hath been sown in blood."[3]

The Baptists clung to the principle of absolute freedom of conscience and worship with amazing and heroic consistency. Conservative in politics, stable in doctrine, the members of the communion were dismayed by the religious fanaticism and the political radicalism of the numerous eccentric sects of the period which threatened the stability of the State and which, it should be recalled, gained most of their converts from Baptist congregations. Yet, even when the sect had had gained religious liberty and a larger degree of social respectability for itself, it showed few symptoms of the intolerance which a solidifying sect normally exhibits. The roots of tolerance were matted deep in the soil of the Baptist philosophy and tradition. To have wrenched them up would have been to destroy the vitality and meaning of a singularly tolerant and fruitful sect.

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[1] W., R., *The fourth paper*, 3; Danvers, *Certain quaeries*, 1.

[2] [Sturgion], *A short discovery*, 5.

[3] *The petition of divers gathered churches*, 2.

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